# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN AMERICAN STUDY OF JESUS, 1865-1965

# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN AMERICAN STUDY OF JESUS, 1865-1965

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by
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## APPROVAL SHEET

# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN AMERICAN STUDY OF JESUS, 1865-1965

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TO JOYCE

καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη
καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ

"All attempts to interpret the past are indirect attempts to understand the present and its future."

From H. Richard Niebuhr's
The Kingdom of God in America.

". . . it is my conviction that an unexamined history operates in us as a fate."

From Gordon Harland's
"The American Protestant Heritage
and the Theological Task."

# PREFACE

Almost from the beginning of the author's formal training in the New Testament, there has existed the conviction that the answer given to the debated relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith is of a pivotal nature. This conviction has been reinforced by the way the question has loomed inexorably behind many areas of discussion in the New Testament Colloquium during the past four years of graduate study. Thus, this dissertation may be said to treat one aspect of a wider field of concern.

American New Testament critics, to judge from their perennial fascination with Jesus of Nazareth, could agree with Whitehead: "The life of Christ . . . has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal." This dissertation intends to explore that interest, accepting Schweitzer's dictum that "there is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus." It is freely admitted, at the same time, that such a dissertation will reveal, with equal plainness, the author's viewpoint. It can only be hoped that in describing a century of study, James Thurber's error will not be duplicated. After trying every adjustment on a microscope in order to sketch a magnified specimen for his botany assignment, he finally began to draw, only to hear the enraged instructor shout, "You've fixed the lens so that it reflects! You've drawn your eye!"

The production of this dissertation has enlisted the gracious help of many. A warm expression of gratitude is due the committee of instruction. Dr. William E. Hull has served as chairman, with Drs. Eric C. Rust, Frank Stagg, and Wayne E. Ward as members. Because of his sabbatical leave of absence during the academic year 1967-68, Dr. Stagg was unable to share in the direct guidance of this dissertation. He has kindly consented, however, to serve as an examiner in the oral examination in the absence of Dr. Rust, whose own sabbatical leave will prevent his participation. A special thanks is due Dr. Harold S. Songer, who served as a committee member during Dr. Stagg's absence, and who will continue on the committee until the completion of the oral examination.

Appreciation is expressed to the staff of the James P. Boyce Library for making available all of its resources. Particularly helpful were Dr. Ronald F. Deering, Research Librarian, and Mrs. Wayne Benson, who secured many volumes through inter-library loan. And to Mrs. J. C. Vick, whose labors in typing this final draft can only be termed a ministry, deep thanks is expressed.

Special tribute is due the members of Guston Baptist Church, Guston, Kentucky, for their understanding and considerateness throughout four years of fellowship. The deepest expression of gratitude, however, must go to the one who

has shared most intimately the full range of feelings that attend graduate study; who has been a constant encouragement through them all; and to whom I dedicate this work: my wife, Joyce.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF JOURNALS AND GENERAL WORKS

| | |
|---|---|
| *AER* | *The American Ecclesiastical Review* |
| *AHR* | *The American Historical Review* |
| *AJT* | *The American Journal of Theology* |
| *ATR* | *Anglican Theological Review* |
| *BrW* | *The British Weekly* |
| *BS* | *The Bibliotheca Sacra* |
| *BSTR* | *Bibliotheca Sacra and Theological Review* |
| *BW* | *The Biblical World* |
| *CBQ* | *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* |
| *CC* | *The Christian Century* |
| *CCr* | *Christianity and Crisis* |
| *CJRT* | *The Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* |
| *Cr* | *Criterion* |
| *CrQ* | *The Crozer Quarterly* |
| *DAB* | *Dictionary of American Biography* |
| *DG* | *The Drew Gateway* |
| *ERE* | *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* |
| *ET* | *The Expository Times* |
| Found | *Foundations* |
| *HDSB* | *The Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* |
| *HT* | *History and Theory* |
| *HTR* | *The Harvard Theological Review* |
| *IB* | *The Interpreter's Bible* |
| *IDB* | *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* |
| *Interp* | *Interpretation* |
| *JBL* | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| *JBR* | *The Journal of Bible and Religion* |
| *JHI* | *Journal of the History of Ideas* |
| *JPh* | *Journal of Philosophy* |
| *JR* | *The Journal of Religion* |
| *LQ* | *The Lutheran Quarterly* |
| *NSHE* | *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* |
| PCB | *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* |
| *RE* | *Review and Expositor* |
| *RL* | *Religion in Life* |
| *RM* | *Religion in the Making* |
| *TCERK* | *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* |
| TR | *Theologische Rundschau* |
| *TTod* | *Theology Today* |
| *USQR* | *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* |
| *WSDB* | *Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* |
| *ZTK* | *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* |

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## I. THE DEFINITION AND DELIMITATION OF THE SUBJECT

The Quest for the historical Jesus is one of those international theological odysseys which has been joined by a distinguished band of American critics. The American segment of the Quest could be fruitfully studied by putting to it any one of a number of central questions. Who were its leaders? Why was the historical recovery of Jesus a crucial theological concern? What historical methods were developed to facilitate research? What typically American portraits of Jesus emerged? The special question which this dissertation poses is this: what historiographical presuppositions have functioned beneath the surface of the American Quest from 1865 until 1965? Hence, this dissertation will attempt to examine the fabric of the American Quest by unravelling one of its threads, thereby providing a specialized history of a century of research.

The historiographical presuppositions of a given critic include his implicit view of the nature, epistemology, and theology/philosophy of history. It involves, in short, the entire range of impelling assumptions governing the historian's inquiry into the past. This study, then, will not aim to recount the methodological developments in historiography so much as the theoretical developments. And since only recently has historiography become acutely problematic, the theoretical foundations of the critic's historiography will be found often to be unconscious and operate at the level of a general mind-set. For this reason the study should not be viewed as an inquiry into the Quester's formal philosophy of history so much as an attempt to uncover his "protophilosophy."[1]

The study is not limited to formal biographies of Jesus. Aspects of the life of Jesus and studies of his teaching will be considered insofar as they illuminate American historiographical presuppositions. There will be no attempt to be exhaustive. The more popular treatments of Jesus' life will be set to one side; those critics who represent the best current scholarship of their periods will be given priority. Foreign-born scholars who worked in America and left their stamp on subsequent American scholarship will be included in the study.

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[1] The crucial influence of protophilosophies in the history of thought is analyzed in George Boas, "The Role of Protophilosophies in Intellectual History," JPh, XLV (1948), 673-84. In historical study, cf. David M. Potter, "Explicit Data and Implicit Assumptions in Historical Study," Generalization in the Writing of History, Louis Gottschalk, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 178-94.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The need for surveys of various fields of research is becoming increasingly urgent as the burgeoning growth of biblical studies continues undiminished. There is an obvious practical advantage gained in the distilling of an unmanageably large bulk of scholarship into the narrower compass of a single study. Scholarly prospect gains invaluable perspective as it is informed by periodic retrospect.

But there is a more pressing compulsion for such a study as this than the expedience of compressing a mass of research into a smaller bundle. The recent efflorescence of hermeneutics has produced a keen sensitivity to the factors which make up the interpreter's own historicity. In the interpretative task the critic must take into account the shaping power of his own inherited categories of language, patterns of approach, and impelling presuppositions. This means that historical criticism must be rigorously applied not only to the documents of the past but also to the interpreter's more immediate tradition. The recognition of the historically conditioned nature of one's own past relativizes that past, breaking its tyranny and allowing the possibility of a more circumspect criticism. In the words of Robert Funk, "we cannot move forward until we move back, until we recapitulate our past and thus gain distance on it."[2] A central purpose, then, of this dissertation is to explore a crucial part of the American tradition in order that it will not circumscribe our present possibilities of interpretation.

Once the American critical past is examined and identified, it will permit a more fruitful international dialogue in theology. The mood of such scholars as Amos Wilder, James M. Robinson, and Robert W. Funk seems to be that of combining the values of American scholarship and tradition with those of the Continent. In this concern to provide an authentic American participation in front-line scholarship, the persistent features of our heritage must be weighed and judged. This thesis is committed, in part, to that endeavor.

## III. PRIOR TREATMENT OF THE SUBJECT

In view of the universally acknowledged value of Albert Schweitzer's account of the Quest for the historical

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[2] Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. xii. The recent intensification of interest in the history of American New Testament scholarship among American critics holds promise for this aim. The Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, for example, at its 1967 meeting, included in its program the presentation of five papers on the history of American New Testament scholarship. One of these papers has appeared as an article in the Society's journal: Robert M. Grant, "American New Testament Study, 1926-1956," JBL, LXXXVII (1968), 42-50.

Jesus, Von Reimarus zu Wrede (1906),[3] and since a number of similar surveys has followed in its wake,[4] it is a matter of surprise that there exists no full account of the American Quest of the historical Jesus. This neglect of the American Quest is the more ironic when one considers the unusual tenacity of the Quest in America. While the Continental Quest came to a virtual halt in the twentieth century, the American fascination with the historical Jesus has continued unbroken until the present.

C. C. McCown's survey,[5] which treats the American Quest more fully than any of the other standard studies, still retains a primarily European focus. This study, then, will attempt to eliminate this scholarly vacuum by examining a full century of the American Quest.

None of the previous life-of-Jesus Forschungen has attempted to analyze historiographical assumptions that have operated in the Quest. Schweitzer's classic work was a protest against the controlling function of the critics' theological bias. Treatments such as McCown's and McArthur's[6] focus upon the methodological developments of the Quest. Roy A. Harrisville's study of representative American lives of Jesus,[7] which was something of a catalyst for this dissertation, provides an analysis of the anti-kerygmatic animus of recent American lives of Jesus. But so far as the author is aware, there exists no single study devoted to the tracing of historiographical presuppositions in the study of Jesus' life. This is perhaps due to the fact that the full implications of historical thinking have only recently begun to be explored.[8]

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[3] The English translation is entitled The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede, trans. W. Montgomery (third edition; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954).

[4] Cf. William Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research (New York: Oxford University Press, 1907); Heinrich Weinel and Alban Widgery, Jesus in the Nineteenth Century and After (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914); Maurice Goguel, The Life of Jesus, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933); C. C. McCown, The Search for the Real Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940) [hereafter cited as The Search]; and Harvey K. McArthur, The Quest through the Centuries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

[5] See footnote 4 above.

## IV. THE DEFINITION OF TERMS

Certain terms which recur throughout the study require definition.

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[6] See footnote 3 above.

[7] Roy A. Harrisville, "Representative American Lives of Jesus," The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ, Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, editors (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 172-96.

[8] Indicative of the recent concern for defining the relationship between faith and history are the following works: Alan Richardson, History Sacred and Profane (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964); Thomas W. Ogletree, Christian Faith and History (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965); Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics (Vol. II of New Directions in Theology Today, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-); and Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966).

## Historicism

This term is used so loosely that a firm definition is extremely difficult to frame.[9] In this study historicism will indicate an overconfidence in the ability of the historical method to sufficiently explain all historical phenomena. Thus defined, historicism involves the attempt to explain historical events, persons, and movements solely in terms of their historical antecedents and context. It thereby poses a threat to historical transcendence and human freedom; it further sees the historical method as capable of supplying the kind of knowledge which serves as an adequate measure of truth and value.[10]

## Positivism

Another term of diffused meaning, positivism will be used in this dissertation to designate that viewpoint which stresses the scientific character of the historical method. The ideals of positivism include an attitude of detached neutrality on the part of the historian, after the alleged manner of the laboratory scientist, as he examines history, and a suspicion of knowledge derived independently of empirical methods.

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[9] See Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, "The Meaning of 'Historicism,'" AHR, LIX (1954), 568-77, for a presentation of its usages.

[10] Similar positions may be found in Richard Kroner, "History and Historicism," JBR, XIV (1946), 131-34, and Clarence T. Craig, "Biblical Theology and the Rise of Historicism," JBL, LXII (1943), 281-94.

Historiography

The term historiography requires careful definition. It will not be employed primarily in its more technical meaning, that of the processes involved in the writing of history. Rather, it will be used to signify the problems connected with the critical philosophy of history, especially centering in the epistemological problems posed for the historian of Jesus who is also a believer. Historiography, then, will include such factors as the nature of history, the relationship between one's theology and the understanding of history, and particularly the means by which the critical historian "recovers" the meaning of a figure who both participates in the scandal of historical particularity and holds absolute ultimacy for faith.

## V. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The chapters of this dissertation treat consecutive chronological periods of the century to be surveyed. Several qualifications to this principle should be noted. First, Chapter II, covering the period prior to 1865, is of a background nature. Second, Chapter VI is a study of the New Quest in America, which overlaps chronologically with part of Chapter V. The justification for this overlapping is the importance attributed to the New Quest as a historiographical option as well as its attempt to overarch the tensions between the two previous periods.

The periodization of the survey is made in terms of round figures and, since historical movements do not confine themselves to neat decades, is only approximate.[11] This circumstance requires that the chronological boundaries of the survey be allowed marginal zones on either side. And though there was an attempt to define the periods as accurately as possible, the status of finality is not claimed for any of them.

## VI. THE AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

In a study of historiographical presuppositions it is perhaps appropriate for the author to identify his own historiographical stance. First, it should be said that the author has been influenced by the very generally held view that sharply distinguishes between history conceived as a body of bruta facta, largely understood upon the model of nature, and history conceived as involving the subjective attribution of meaning and value to "outward" events. To say this, however, is to say little more than that he is heir to the mainstream of twentieth century theology.

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[11] A single exception to this principle is the periodization of the New Quest, which, having been inaugurated in 1953 as a conscious new departure, can be dated with precision.

More precisely, the following convictions contribute to the author's perspective. Theologically, history is ultimately in God's hands. This means that history is permeated with purpose and meaning.[12] But since history is also shaped by the decisions and commitments of men who oscillate between good and evil in the potentialities of human freedom, history also reveals demonic chasms where the divine purpose seems to be either thwarted or obscured.

Ontologically, history embodies a dimension of transcendent mystery which cannot be fully grasped by the objective tools of the historical critic. It is difficult to define the nature of this dimension, but the Christian affirmation that the self-disclosures of God in history can be only partially perceived attests to its reality.[13]

Epistemologically, historical knowledge requires that the historian approach his study in a different way than the laboratory chemist observes chemical processes. In historical study, empathetic "understanding" of the meaning of events for the participants is the key to historical knowledge. The views of such men as Dilthey, Collingwood, and Bultmann each point in their own distinctive ways toward this consensus.[14] Thus, the stance of engagement with history replaces the stance of neutral observation. To understand history, the historian must interrogate the past with the questions which arise from his own concerns. In this sense, "the most subjective interpretation of history is at the same time the most objective."[15]

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[12] Cf. Eric C. Rust, Towards a Theological Understanding of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 48-74.

[13] Ibid., pp. 63ff.

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[14] See Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society, trans. and ed. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. 113-32; R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 217-31; Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), chapters VIII and IX.

[15] Bultmann, op. cit., p. 122.

## CHAPTER II

## THE STUDY OF JESUS BEFORE HIGHER CRITICISM

Like the absolute location of the headwaters of the Mississippi, the determination of an incontestable beginning point of historical-minded thinking in America is doomed to failure. It is customary to designate the nineteenth century as the period when the historical revolution established its sway in the western world.[1] Although this generalization may tend to obscure the achievements of Continental historical criticism in the preceding centuries of the Renaissance, it is certainly accurate for America. Before the nineteenth century the historical study of the Gospels in America was virtually non-existent.

This condition stemmed from multiple causes. Within the context of the western Zeitgeist, the Enlightenment had fostered a rationalism that turned its back on history.[2] The conceptions of a static human nature and of absolute timeless truths of reason[3] were inhospitable to historical research. Furthermore, the place of history in the teaching curriculum was negligible, even in Europe's great universities, before the nineteenth century.[4]

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[1] James Westfall Thompson, A History of Historical Writing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), II, 149. Cf. Richardson, op. cit., pp. 103ff., and G. P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century (second edition; New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1913), p. 13.

[2] Richardson, op. cit., pp. 84ff.

[3] Lessing's well-known saying that the accidental

More immediately in America, the preoccupation of the seventeenth century Puritan divines was with a scholastic type of Reformed orthodoxy.[5] A rigorous elaboration of the formularies of the Westminster Confession of 1646 issued forth in a spate of "systems of divinity." Education was sponsored as an extension of the religious concern.[6] Although secularizing tendencies early leavened the colleges,[7] the study of history did not form a part of these more secular interests.

By the time of the eighteenth century, fresh breezes were whispering through New England. The impetus came from

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truths of history can never become the proof of the necessary truths of reason indicates the rationalists' slight esteem for history.

[4] Gooch, op. cit., pp. 12f.

[5] Frank H. Foster, A Genetic History of the New England Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1907), pp. 20f.

[6] Ibid. See also Sidney E. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America," The Shaping of American Religion (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 242.

[7] Will Herberg, "Religion and Education in America," Religious Perspectives in American Culture (Vol. II of Religion in American Life, eds. J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 14.

two chief figures: Isaac Newton and John Locke. An intellectual revolution was beginning to translate itself into the language of philosophy, psychology, morals, religion, and government.[8] By the end of the century the American Enlightenment had been born. As in Europe, however, the Enlightenment was only an indirect inspiration to historical thought. The theological developments of America in the eighteenth century were spelled out in the letters of a Calvinist alphabet.[9]

In such an atmosphere, historical studies were crowded out by theology and philosophy. Gambrell has thoroughly investigated the curricula of the colonial New England colleges,[10] and the poverty of historical studies was quite pronounced. Although an increasing secularization of the colonial colleges was revealed in the growing attention given to natural philosophy, science, and mathematics,[11] history was rarely if ever taught in New England in the mideighteenth century.[12] Indeed, the appointment of Jared Sparks to a Harvard chair in 1839 marks the first recognition of historical teaching in an American university.[13] The later dominance of a historically stifling classical education, whose aim was mental discipline and character training, was not broken in the American colleges until about 1860.[14]

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[8] Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, pp. 243f.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 244f.

[10] Mary L. Gambrell, *Ministerial Training in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

[11] Richard Hofstadter and W. P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 194ff.

Because of this disinterest in history which marked the seventeenth, eighteenth, and part of the nineteenth centuries, they may fairly be called the age of historical innocence. In this period the Gospels were assessed as patently good historical records. Before the great historical revolution, what little interest there was in the life of Jesus labored largely under the easy yoke of a most traditional historiography. The life of Jesus was scarcely a concern before the nineteenth century; a historical problem it certainly was not.[15]

This chapter will examine three strands of the study of Jesus prior to 1865: the orthodox supernaturalists; the rationalists; and the early American liberals. Since Jesus' life became the object of formal historical study only late in the period surveyed, the historiographical assumptions which were operative during most of the period must be obtained rather obliquely. This explains the occasional nature of many of the sources which will be analyzed.

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[12] Gambrell, op. cit., p. 81.

[13] Gooch, op. cit., p. 403.

[14] G. P. Schmidt, "Colleges in Ferment," AHR, LIX (1953-54), 22.

[15] Goguel, op. cit., p. 38.

## I. JESUS IN ORTHODOX SUPERNATURALISM

### The New England Theology

Through most of the eighteenth century, biblical studies pined under the thick shadow of Reformed scholasticism.[16] Not the incursions of historical criticism, but the assault of Arminianism and rationalism was the focal point of theological debate. This state of affairs is faithfully mirrored in the career of the greatest representative of the New England theology, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). From his published works[17] may be gleaned his indifference to the biographical aspect of Jesus' life.

Edwards found the chief value of Christ's life in its witness to his mediatorial function. Through his teachings and acts, and supremely in the cross, is his office of mediator revealed. In a biting polemic against Unitarian tendencies, entitled "Mysteries of Scriptures," Edwards denied that the bare affirmation that a man named Jesus came revealing God's will is sufficient for faith. True belief presses on to discover whether or not

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[16] Otto Heick gives an excellent discussion of this period and a helpful bibliography in A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), II, 412-25.

[17] The most complete edition of his works is S. Austin (ed.), The Works of President Edwards (4 vols.; eighth edition; New York: Leavitt and Company, 1851) [hereafter cited as Works].

> . . . he has satisfied for our sins; if he has suffered in our stead; if he has truly purchased eternal life and happiness for us; if he has redeemed us from an extremely and perfectly sinful, miserable, helpless state, a state wherein we deserved no mercy, but eternal misery without mercy;[18]

Clearly, the human life of Jesus was eclipsed by the celestial splendor of his saving office.

To demonstrate this aspect of theology in that century, any one of a number of Edwards' successors might have been chosen. For Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) or Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), as for Edwards, the slogan of protest, "Christ, not creeds," was a distant cry that must await the day when the force of their systems had been leached away.

## Biblical Studies at Andover

Andover Seminary was founded in 1808 as Congregationalism's counter-measure to the election of Henry Ware, an anti-trinitarian, to the Hollis chair of divinity at Harvard in 1805. But although Andover was established to check the growing theological liberalism within Congregationalism, a most vigorous and creative biblical study flourished there from the beginning. Two of America's pioneer biblical scholars, Moses Stuart and Edward Robinson, stand in the Andover tradition.

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[18] Works, III, 543; cf. I, 406-16 and III, 597.

Moses Stuart.[19] If Edwards was a classic embodiment of the eighteenth century's disinterest in the historical, Moses Stuart (1780-1852) marks a transitional stage of growing historical awareness in American biblical study. Stuart began his work in 1810 when he became Professor of Sacred Literature at Andover. His contribution was two-fold. First, he energetically pursued the study of the biblical languages. Stuart's pioneer labors led him to publish America's first Hebrew grammar in 1821.[20] It was precisely his concern for philology that spurred him to his second lasting contribution. Aware that Germany was leading the vanguard of biblical philology, he immersed himself in German theological literature and subsequently introduced America to the quickening minds of German theology.[21] After translating

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[19] W. F. Albright, "Stuart, Moses," DAB, XVIII, 175.

[20] Moses Stuart, A Grammar of the Hebrew Language (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1821).

[21] For a high estimate of Stuart's role in inaugurat-

Gesenius' Hebrew grammar and Winer's Greek grammar, he introduced American exegetes to Ewald and Rosenmüller.[22] Aptly called the "father of biblical learning" in America,[23] Stuart began a school that was to produce figures of such stature as Edward Robinson and Joseph H. Thayer.

Stuart's only direct contribution to the study of the life of Jesus was the printing of Newcome's Greek harmony in 1814.[24] This harmony had been the eclectic production of Bishop Newcome in 1778. It employed Griesbach's text, arranging it in the traditional four parallel columns. The sequence and notes were Newcome's contribution. The harmony was an interesting hybrid, for Griesbach himself had abandoned the use of John and initiated the three-gospel synopsis.[25] Thus, as in typical harmonies, the order was Johannine in Stuart's harmony.

His approach to the life of Jesus was governed by a

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ing German thought in America, see C. F. Thwing, The American and the German University (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 7, 191f. Cf. Jurgen Herbst, The German Historical School in American Scholarship (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 80-83.

[22] Herbst, op. cit., p. 190.

[23] Ibid., p. 7.

[24] Moses Stuart (comp.), A Harmony in Greek of the Gospels with Notes (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1814).

[25] Kendrick Grobel, "Harmony of the Gospels," IDB, II, 525.

strict view of the inspiration of the Bible.[26] Since the sacred writers were equally inspired, it was of relatively minor importance whether a given writer were psalmist, prophet, or apostle. This view necessarily militated against a concern for the biographical details of the man, Jesus of Nazareth. The earthly life was but a kenotic interlude of One who is from everlasting unto everlasting. Still, as in Edwards, the historical Jesus was overshadowed by the eternal Christ of dogma. The events of his life as narrated in the Gospels were entirely reliable. The exegete's task was to arrange those events into a harmonious portrait. The biblical accounts, properly harmonized and interpreted by the obvious laws of philology, would yield an authentic life of Christ.[27]

Edward Robinson. Stuart's enormous influence on Andover students[28] may be documented by the career of Edward Robinson[29] (1794-1863), Stuart's foremost pupil in the biblical field. Robinson left his teaching post at Andover in

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[26] Moses Stuart, Letters to the Rev. Wm. E. Channing (second edition; Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1819), pp. 165ff.

[27] Ibid., p. 155.

[28] Roland Bainton, Yale and the Ministry (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 92f.

[29] The best summary of his achievements may be found in W. F. Albright, "Robinson, Edward," DAB, XVI, 40-41. Cf. also G. Prentiss, The Union Theological Seminary (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 1889), pp. 46-48; 243-50.

1826, beginning a four year pursuit of biblical studies in Germany. The influence of the philologists Gesenius and Rödiger upon him was strong, but the geographist Ritter left the most decisive stamp. After returning to Andover, Robinson was called in 1837 to the chair of biblical literature at the infant Union Theological Seminary, which became the scene of his great productivity. Robinson had earlier aided Stuart in translating Winer's grammar. His philological prowess was further evidenced by his translation of Gesenius' Hebrew grammar, with alterations and additions,[30] and his own New Testament Greek lexicon.[31] His crowning achievement was the publication of the results of an expedition to Palestine.[32] This large study established him as one of the world's foremost geographers and biblical scholars.

The explorations of Robinson are to be seen as part of the growing historical awareness which characterized the century. It was becoming important to verify historically the biblical sites. The timeless quality of earlier biblical history was melting under the vibrant rays of a new concern for the human past. The time when the high relief of historical empathy, fostered by romanticism, replaced a two-dimensional rendering of the past was already signaled in Robinson's researches. He attempted to recover "information upon the historical topography of Palestine"[33] which would be of historical service in "promoting the study and illustration of Holy Scriptures."[34] Robinson's labors were thus intended to amplify, not challenge, the biblical history. By demonstrating its concrete, historical connections, he extended its claim to final authority.

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[30] Friedrich H. W. Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, trans. E. Robinson (revised edition; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, Publisher, 1844).

[31] Edward Robinson, A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, Publisher, 1836).

[32] Edward Robinson, Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea (3 vols.; Boston: Published by Crocker and Brewster, 1841).

His knowledge of Palestinian lore figured in the production of his Gospel harmony.[35] Robinson wrote in his preface that a harmony should employ "the results of all these recent investigations into language, manners and customs, history, geography and the like."[36] He indicated that his close study of Palestine enriched his harmony:

> I have also everywhere endeavored faithfully to judge and write, according to the impressions left on my mind by a personal inspection of most of the scenes of Gospel History.[37]

This personal acquaintance with the ancient scenes failed, however, to alter the basic structure of his harmony. He still operated on the premise that the Gospels were, at bottom, accurate historical accounts. Additional information about customs and topography would dispel any apparent discrepancies.[38]

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[33] _Ibid_., I, v.

[34] _Ibid_., I, xiii.

[35] Edward Robinson, _A Harmony of the Four Gospels in Greek_ (Boston: Published by Crocker and Brewster, 1834).

[36] _Ibid_., p. iv.

[37] _Ibid_.

## The Emergence of the First Lives

Lateness of the American lives. American study of the life of Jesus came relatively late. It is an exercise in threshing straw to search for American counterparts to the rationalistic lives of Jesus found in Germany as early as the late eighteenth century.[39] Several causes for this lag may be suggested. As a young nation, America lacked the excellence of libraries, universities, and cultural heritage so marked in Germany.[40] Again, while Germany's eminent theologians were found chiefly in the faculties of great universities, funded by the state, America's peculiar seminary system, directly dependent on denominational support, strongly discouraged heterodox critical research.[41] More specifically, the historically enervating systems of divinity that flourished in Protestant scholasticism were longer-lived in America than in Germany.[42] As long as Jesus was valued in terms of his place in a purely transcendent drama of redemption, his specifically human life was of relatively slight interest. His personality, example, and psychological development remained largely the desiderata of a liberal-oriented theology. The Sturm und Drang of romantic enthusiasm that coalesced with German pietism produced a keen interest in the life of Jesus.[43] It is suggestive that American transcendentalism, akin to German romanticism, was marked by a certain quality of historical aloofness:

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[38] Cf. Edward Robinson, "The Alleged Discrepancy Between John and the Other Evangelists Respecting our Lord's Last Passover," BSTR, II (1845), 434: "We hold, on the contrary, that the four Evangelists all testify to one and the same simple truth; and that there exists among them no contradiction."

[39] The lives of Hess (published 1768-1772) and Reinhard (published 1781) are examples. One might also mention the imaginative lives of Bahrdt and Venturini which are nearly as early.

[40] Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of Its Political Social, and Religious Character, ed. Perry Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 56-64. Schaff's sketch was first published in 1855.

> The transcendentalists' attitude toward history was like their attitude toward nature. They felt above it. . . . They read history, of course, the more ancient and remote the better, but they merely "appropriated" it to kindle their imagination or to furnish texts for spirit-

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[41] B. S. Easton, "America's Contribution to New Testament Science," ET, XLII (1930-31), 265.

[42] The Old School Presbyterians, for example, were dominant at Princeton on into the twentieth century. For a summary of their history see Heick, op. cit., II, 440-43.

[43] McCown, The Search, pp. 34-52.

> ual lessons. . . . Few looked backward with a historian's interest.[44]

At any rate, no great life of Jesus was produced in America before 1865,[45] or, indeed, in the entire nineteenth century. Very early, American savants were aware of the accelerating interest in the life of Jesus, especially through the alarming researches of Strauss and Renan;[46] but their initial attitude was, for the most part, quite testy.[47] Their chief complaint was directed toward the German embarrassment with the supernatural.[48] By 1862, however, American orthodoxy had produced its most substantial life of the nineteenth century.[49]

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[44] Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy (second edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 243.

[45] A scrutiny of the standard surveys of life-of-Jesus study shows no American life to compare with nineteenth century European efforts. Cf. Schweitzer, op. cit.; Goguel, op. cit.; Sanday, op. cit.; Weinel and Widgery, op. cit.; and McCown, The Search. The earliest American life of Jesus was by Henry Ware, Jr., in 1833 (cf. ante, pp. 40f.).

[46] H. B. Hackett, "Critique of Strauss' Life of Jesus," BSTR, II (1845), 48-79.

[47] See, for example, Samuel J. Andrews, "Works on the Life of Christ," BS, XXII (1865), 188-90. Similar in response is Charles M. Mead, "More Recent Works on the Life of Christ," BS, XXII (1865), 222. For an example of earlier rejection see Hackett, op. cit., pp. 71-79.

[48] Andrews, op. cit., pp. 192f., gives a typical response.

[49] The work referred to is Samuel J. Andrews, The Life

Samuel J. Andrews,[50] (1817-1906). It is quite significant that in America the preponderance of nineteenth century lives was produced not by professors but by the clergy. Appropriately, Andrews' life (1862), which was the century's most ambitious one in scholarly detail, came from a minister's hand. Andrews' study continues the tradition of Stuart and Robinson in his preoccupation with chronology and harmonization. Though he is an independent thinker who sifts massive quantities of data,[51] he usually follows Robinson.[52] Andrews' encyclopedic examination of scraps of Gospel evidence which promise possible light on the chronology of Jesus' life is sustained by a view of the Gospels as real historical records. Quite candidly he "assumes that they are genuine historical documents."[53] This assumption

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of Our Lord upon the Earth (revised edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), [hereafter cited as Life]. The author's estimate of Andrews' work is informed by the judgment of William B. Hill, A Guide to the Lives of Christ for English Readers (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, Publisher, 1905), p. 36. Cf. S. G. Ayres, Jesus Christ Our Lord: An English Bibliography of Christology Comprising Over Five Thousand Titles Annotated and Classified (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1906), p. 49.

[50] Biographical data is drawn from Samuel Soule, "Andrews, Samuel James, DAB, I, 296.

[51] For example, Andrews, Life, p. 65.

[52] E. F. Williams, "Recent Lives of Christ," BS, XLIII (1886), 237.

[53] Andrews, Life, p. v.

was not purely naïve. Andrews was acquainted with the Continental research of his day and had reviewed such works as those of Ewald, Hase, and Ebrard in a lengthy article.[54] Yet his antipathy to the "negative criticism" of the Germans is everywhere evident in that review: "They who come in their intellectual pride with their learned apparatus to the study of the gospel, as they go to the study of a heathen historian or poet, will miserably fail of their end. . . ."[55] The assaults of the critics had not, in his opinion, damaged the historical accuracy of the Gospels: "We think ourselves fully warranted in saying that the historical accuracy of the Gospels never stood so well confirmed, and in such clear light, as to-day."[56] Thus, Andrews felt warranted in taking inadvertant time notices in the Gospels and weighing each one as a "datum" in achieving a precise chronology. Minute time notices in the records were combined with a plethora of external evidence drawn from astronomy, rabbinics, and tradition. The result is an impressive marshalling of chronological evidence which gives every impression of scientific accuracy.

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[54] Andrews, "Works on the Life of Christ," BS, XXII (1865), 177-206.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

## II. JESUS AND AMERICAN RATIONALISM

Jonathan Edwards' discovery of John Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding while a fourteen year-old student at Yale yielded him a pleasure greater "than the most greedy miser finds, when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly-discovered treasure."[57] His reaction was premonitory of an American awakening to the European Enlightenment. The source of this American awakening[58] was, most immediately, English Deism,[59] though the rational mood of all of enlightened Europe was being belatedly absorbed.[60] The American liberal clergy were harbingers of the golden age of American rationalism, an age coeval with the Revolutionary period.[61]

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[57] Quoted in Ahlstrom, op. cit., p. 245.

[58] The standard history is Herbert Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960).

[59] Walter G. Muelder and Lawrence Sears, The Development of American Philosophy: a Book of Readings (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), p. 65. Similar in viewpoint is J. M. Robertson, A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), p. 52. Vernon L. Parrington traces a stronger French influence on American liberal thought in his Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), I, 267-73.

[60] For a well-informed bibliography, replete with annotations, see Nelson Burr, A Critical Bibliography of Religion in America (Vol. IV of Religion in American Life, eds. J. W. Smith and A. L. Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 184-206.

Apart from this Christian wing of rationalists, there also emerged a more skeptical, anti-ecclesiastical movement.[62] It was religiously radical, politically revolutionary, and literarily satirical. It drew ideas from the early English exponents of Deism, men such as Toland, Herbert, and Tindal. The idea of a supernaturally revealed religion was utterly repugnant to these militant rationalists. Emerging in the exciting era of scientific discovery, they were eager to apply the rational canons by which nature operated to the unruly mysteriousness of revealed religion.

## Militant Rationalism

It fell the lot of a native Englishman, Thomas Paine (1737-1809), to contribute more to the propagation of Deism in America than any other figure. Paine owed his early popularity in America to his patriotic services in the struggle for independence. After the publication of his Age of Reason (1793), written while in France, he became the storm-center of the Deist controversy raging in America. In recognition of the formative force of Paine upon American rationalism, his Age of Reason, a crystallization of rationalist tenets, will be examined to discover its historiographical procedures in assessing the life of Jesus.

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[61] Ibid., p. 205.

[62] The left wing of American rationalism is described in Martin E. Marty, The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 19-32.

In the debacle of the French revolution, with atheism gathering velocity, Paine hurriedly wrote his Age of Reason to preserve true religion.[63] Since prophecy, miracle, and supernatural revelation are not reasonable, they were, perforce, repudiated by Paine. Paine's arguments against the truth of the Bible were basically two-fold: (1) the Bible contains material that is *prima facie* false, for it revolts human reason.[64] (2) Since truth is of a single piece, patent contradictions within the Bible itself negate its claim to truth.[65] This second canon was especially decisive in determining the historical accuracy of the details of Jesus' life because of its obvious relevance to what is now termed the Synoptic problem. Paine's formulation of this criterion of historical accuracy is pointed and precise:

> I lay it down as a position which cannot be controverted, first, that the agreement of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree, and the whole may be false; secondly, that the disagreement of the parts of a story proves the

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[63] Thomas Paine, The Theological Works of Thomas Paine (Boston: Printed for the Advocates of Common Sense, 1834), p. 27.

[64] *Ibid.*, pp. 77ff.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

> whole cannot be true. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively.[66]

Having erected this theorem, Paine easily demolished the truth of the Gospels. Discrepancies, contradictions, and omissions are multiplied from the records.[67]

Paine's primary interest was not in assessing the historically authentic core of Jesus' life, but rather in excising the supernatural from the Gospels. Yet he considered the character and teaching of Jesus to be manifestly recoverable:

> Nothing that is here said can apply, even with the most distant disrespect, to the real character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before; by the Quakers since; and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any.[68]

Paine's historiography shows, if not historical innocence, historical apathy. His rejection of the sources is dictated by principles inhering in the rationalist worldview. Given the closed universe of the Deist, historical violations of that order may be excluded *a priori*. What is missing is the exclusion of historical evidence by historical argument. Two basic historiographical assumptions appear in Paine. The first is shared by the orthodox and Deist alike: Truth is a uniform whole.[69] The orthodox supernaturalists must thereby harmonize the entire Scriptures; Paine, in turn, saw the Bible shattered on the wheel of discrepancy. On the second assumption, pious and Deist part company, for Paine insisted that historical evidence submit to the jury of reason. This led him to strip off what was offensive in the portrait of Jesus and to accept what remained as genuine history. Given the well-honed pruning-hook of reason, the Gospels could be used as historical documents.

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[66] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 126-33.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

## Moderate Rationalism[70]

Ranged behind the militant shock troops of the rationalist attack, yet ahead of the distinctly Christian liberals, was a group of moderate rationalists which included such scientists as Benjamin Rush and Joseph Priestly, and enlightened statesmen like Franklin and Jefferson. More judicious, and less vocal than the radicals in their dissent, they nevertheless joined the front against supernatural religion.

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[69] Ibid., p. 124: "Truth is an uniform thing. . . ."

[70] Consult Burr, op. cit., pp. 196-98, for a full bibliography of the movement. Morais, op. cit., pp. 54-119, shows the inter-relatedness of the major figures. Marty, op. cit., pp. 26-32 documents the mediating stance of this middle group.

Thomas Jefferson held the age of reason's stereotyped image of Jesus. He carefully distinguished between the pure teachings of Jesus and the perversion of his doctrine by the Church:

> To the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished anyone to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other.[71]

Jefferson's admiration for the "genuine precepts" of Jesus led him to the compilation of the so-called "Jefferson Bible," entitled The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, and English.[72] This volume was made by cutting out passages from the Gospels, primarily Matthew and Luke, and pasting them in a harmonized arrangement. This was done in four parallel columns, one for each of the four languages indicated by the title. Jefferson's intention may be understood from a letter he wrote mentioning the work:

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[71] Taken from a letter to Benjamin Rush dated April 21, 1803, cited by Muelder and Sears, op. cit., pp. 76ff.

[72] Thomas Jefferson, The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, and English (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904). A brief introduction to the composition of the document, written by Cyrus Adler, may be found in the same volume. For further information, consult Foote, op. cit., pp. 51-56, and John A. Hardon, "The Jefferson Bible," AER, CXXX (1954), 361-75.

> We must reduce our volume to the simple Evangelists: even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms into which they have been led, by forgetting, often, or not understanding what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as to his dicta, and by expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his and which is as easily distinguished as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is an octavo of forty-six pages of pure and unsophisticated doctrines such as were professed and acted upon by the unlettered Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers and the Christians of the first century.[73]

The resultant work was indeed more concerned with Jesus' morals than his life. Yet Jefferson did not limit the work to teachings of Jesus. He simply deleted any verse or passage implying the miraculous or Jesus' divinity. Thus, Jesus' life began with an expurgated Luke 2, and ended with Jesus' burial in Joseph's tomb.

Like Edwards before him, Jefferson was bereft of historical imagination. This is not to say that Jefferson ignored history. As a great humanist, perhaps America's greatest in his age,[74] he was keenly interested in historical studies and actually helped advance the critical study of history in two distinct ways. First, he recognized the superiority of primary sources to secondary ones and energetically followed this clue.[75] Second, his rejection of the miraculous was but the embryonic formulation of what was later to become a presupposition of nineteenth century historiography, namely, that events of the past are analogous to present experience.[76] In the life of Jesus, this second principle had an especially crucial bearing. Jefferson wrote to young Peter Carr in 1787:

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[73] From a letter of 1813 to John Adams, cited by Foote, _op_. _cit_., pp. 51f.

[74] Karl Lehmann, _Thomas Jefferson_: _American Humanist_ (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), esp. pp. 1-6.

> Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature does not weigh against them. But those facts in the bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. . . .[77]

Jefferson's historiography was obviously in rationalistic captivity. Like Paine, his criterion for authenticity was rational deduction more than historical induction. The teaching of Jesus, as distinguished from secondary accretions, was discerned by its inherent appeal. They were "as easily distinguished as diamonds in a dunghill."[78] The

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[75] *Ibid*., pp. 87ff.

[76] See, for example, Ernst Troeltsch, "Historiography," *ERE*, VI, 716-23.

[77] Cited by Lehmann, *op*. *cit*., p. 88.

[78] Cited by Foote, *op*. *cit*., p. 52.

Gospels remain basically historical documents which only must be filtered through the commonsense sieve of reason to reveal the actual life of Jesus.

## III. JESUS IN EARLY AMERICAN LIBERALISM

The cumulative strength of the liberal protest against orthodoxy, dating back to such leaders as Chauncy, Gay, and Mayhew, was climaxed in 1805 when Henry Ware was chosen to fill the Hollis Chair of Divinity at Harvard. Ware was an outspoken liberal, and the breakdown of Calvinism, humorously described in Holme's poem, "The Deacon's Masterpiece," was, with his election, fully under way. The liberal movement in America produced two streams which were different in degree rather than in kind: Universalism thought God too good to damn men while Unitarianism thought man too good to be damned.[79] Of the two movements, Universalism was the earlier, Unitarianism the more influential. Unitarianism[80] drew support from a broad spectrum of liberal leaders. In its early, more amorphous, beginnings, it was nearer a mood than a specific sect. There were "mild" Unitarians such as

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[79] Heick, op. cit., p. 427.

[80] The standard history of Unitarianism is Earl M. Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America (Vol. II of A History of Unitarianism. 2 vols.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1945-52).

Joseph Priestly, William Channing, and Andrews Norton, as well as more radical figures such as Theodore Parker and Ralph W. Emerson. Except for Parker, the early American liberals offered no innovations in the historiography of American study of the life of Jesus. The Gospels were accepted as documents of history which, properly interpreted, revealed the actual life of Jesus.

## Andrews Norton[81]

In 1813, two years after its founding, Andrews Norton (1786-1853) became the Dexter Lecturer on Biblical Criticism at Harvard Divinity School. His distinguished predecessor, William Channing, had lectured the previous year, following Joseph Buckminster, who likewise had served only one year. Buckminster, a brilliant scholar, died in 1812 at the age of twenty-eight. He had, in his short career, helped introduce German critical thought to the Harvard liberals, opening for them new doors of hermeneutics. Norton gladly passed through the doors, accepting the liberating influences, yet retaining a conservative regard for the Bible as the infallible revelation of God's will. This theological conservatism, which secured for him Carlyle's epithet, "the Unitarian Pope," has tended to obscure Norton's just reputation as a creative biblical scholar.

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[81] For biography, see Henry W. Foote, "Norton, Andrews," DAB, XIII, 568-69. An excellent analysis of Norton's critical views may be found in Conrad Wright, "The Early Period (1811-40)," *The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture*, George H. Williams, editor (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 46-51.

While Norton did not attempt a life of Jesus, he was profoundly concerned with the question of the genuineness of the Gospels. His international recognition as a biblical scholar rested upon his work Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels.[82] This massive three-volume work was a thorough investigation of the external evidence that the canonical Gospels, as we know them, are essentially the same as originally written and were penned by the authors whose names they bear.

Norton's grasp of the nature of the Gospels was in advance of his time. He viewed the Gospels as attempts of unlettered men to select the true traditions about Jesus from a welter of traditions, both true and false, and to collect them into accounts which did not aim at strict chronology or completeness.[83] Yet he was sure that the traditions incorporated into the Gospels were fundamentally historical. Arguing for the traditional authorship he wrote:

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[82] Andrews Norton, The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels (3 vols.; Cambridge: Published by John Owen, 1837-44).

[83] Andrews Norton, Internal Evidences of the Gospels (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1855), pp. 103-8.

> . . . if their genuineness be proved, their truth is established; for it would be folly to suppose that disciples of Jesus, in the midst of unbelievers and enemies, whom it was evidently their purpose to impress with the noblest truths and sentiments of religion and morality, put forth pretended histories of their master full of marvelous fables, and obtained reception for these fables, though they and their contemporaries knew them to be false.[84]

This presupposition is the clue to the extensive labor of Norton to establish the apostolic authorship of the Gospels. He complements this argument with another which makes them tautological. If the Gospels be true, as determined by internal criteria, then they are the works of the traditional authors.[85] In formulating the internal evidences, Norton relies heavily on the "evidences of Christianity" tradition which began as a rational apologetic attempt in the face of English Deism and continued into the nineteenth century.[86] His arguments are that the public character of the Gospels forbids deviation from historical truth;[87] that the moral character of Christ could not have been invented by unlettered peasants;[88] and that the naive honesty of the Evangelists is entirely dissonant with motives of fraud.[89] These arguments are "reasonable," not historical. They assume that human nature is a timeless and abstract entity; that the men of the first century held the modern period's notions of the miraculous; and that the Enlightenment's closed universe, operating on natural laws, was the world-view of apostolic times. His historiography suffers from its failure to establish rapport with a pre-rational past.

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[84] Ibid., p. 10.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Joseph Butler (d. 1752), whose Analogies of Religion was the best answer ever given to the Deist protest, crystallized a standard kind of apology for revealed religion. William Paley later added his highly influential Evidences of Christianity (1794), a text which was used at Harvard during Norton's career. See Wright, op. cit., pp. 38-39. In America, this rationalistic tradition was continued through such works as J. G. Palfrey, Lowell Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity. (2 vols.; Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1843); Mark Hopkins, Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity (Boston: Published by T. R. Marvin, 1847); and Ebenezer Dodge, Evidences of Christianity (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1869). Many similar works could be added to this list.

### Henry Ware, Jr.[90]

The earliest formal life of Jesus written in America was that of Henry Ware, Jr. (1794-1843). He wrote *The Life of the Saviour*[91] in 1833, two years before Strauss published his *Leben Jesu*. Unlike Strauss, however, his book was of a popular, though well-informed, character, being intended as an aid to intelligent and devotional study of the Gospels.[92] Its primary interest is its early appearance.

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[87] Andrews Norton, *Internal Evidences of the Gospels* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1855), pp. 31-33.

[88] *Ibid*., pp. 245-48; 267-69.

[89] *Ibid*., pp. 284-87.

[90] Harris E. Starr, "Ware, Henry," *DAB*, XIX, 448-49.

[91] Henry Ware, *The Life of the Saviour* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray and Company, 1833).

Ware was the son of Henry Ware, whose assumption of the Hollis chair at Harvard precipitated the open rift between conservative and liberal Congregationalists in 1805. He joined the Harvard faculty in 1828 as professor of pulpit eloquence, thus indicating that his special abilities were not in the biblical field. Ware's life of Jesus was harmonistic. The birth, miracles, and Resurrection were treated in a quite orthodox way. The Gospels were viewed as historical narratives presenting unvarnished history. Matthew and John, being eye-witnesses, were especially valued.[93]

### William H. Furness[94]

In the more conservative wing of Unitarianism was found perhaps the most prolific contributor to the study of Jesus' life in the nineteenth century, William H. Furness (1802-1896).[95] Like Norton, Furness was deeply committed to the defense of the historical authenticity of the Gospels. Amid the passing of the old Calvinism, Furness labored to preserve an appreciation for the historical verity of the Gospels, properly purged of creedal encrustations.[96] He was a friend of Parker's, attended "dame's school" and Latin school with Emerson, studied under Norton, and was profoundly influenced by transcendentalism. Jesus was to him perfectly at one with nature:

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[92] Starr, *op. cit.*, p. 449. The volume was written for "The Sunday Library," a series intended for suitable Sunday reading for youth.

[93] Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 217, for example.

[94] Frederick T. Persons, "Furness, William Henry," *DAB*, VII, 80.

[95] His works dealing with the life of Jesus include *Jesus and His Biographers or the Remarks on the Four Gospels* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1838) [hereafter

> Let it be that he taught nothing more than the religion of Nature, still by concentrating all its force and loveliness in his individual being, by incorporating it with his life, and so teaching it as it had never been taught by any other, he made natural religion *his* religion, *his* truth.[97]

Sustained by this view, Furness labored tirelessly to recover the actual life of Jesus. His task was to determine, in the face of a rationalistic skepticism, whether or not the Gospels were

> . . . mere collections of legends, compositions in which historical fictions are mixed up with a few choice

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cited as *Jesus*]; *A History of Jesus* (Boston: Wm. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1850); *Thoughts on the Life and Character of Jesus of Nazareth* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company, 1859); *The Veil Partly Lifted and Jesus Becoming Visible* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864); and *The Story of the Resurrection of Christ Told Once More with Remarks upon the Character of Christ and the Historical Claims of the Four Gospels* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1885) [hereafter cited as *Resurrection*].

[96] Furness, *Jesus*, p. 1. Cf. Persons, *loc. cit.*

[97] Furness, *Jesus*, p. 234.

> grains of moral truth? Or, are they honest and authentic histories, relations of real events, of things that actually took place as they are represented containing, it may be, some misstatements here and there, with regard to a few, subordinate particulars, but substantially true and accurate . . .[98]

His method of answering this question was to scrutinize the Gospels internally. Furness believed that a work bore its own credentials of historical truth.[99] Employing arguments that had been formulated in the "evidences" tradition, Furness applied them specifically and in great detail to the Gospel narratives. He first argued for the historical nature of the Gospels. Their public character would preclude deception;[100] the verisimilitude of places and names would be impossible to fabricate; the Evangelists may have been deluded but would not have risked exposure by publicly falsifying history. The errors of the Gospels, such as the discrepancies of the Resurrection accounts, were occasioned by historical events. One of the two angels reported by Luke was, in actuality, the white head-cloth which had been laid aside by Jesus in the tomb. In the darkness of the grave, and under the excitement of the moment, the linen bundle was mistaken for an angel.[101]

All of the criteria of historical accuracy employed by Furness confidently rely on rationalistic assumptions. He assumed that the mind has an inherent faculty which can discriminate truth from fabrication. He instinctively knew which of the Synoptic accounts were most historically accurate, because they appealed more powerfully to his spiritual intuition than the others.[102] Furness viewed the first century from the limited perspective of his own thought-world. Nineteenth century views of literary fraud and historical awareness were projected upon both the writers and readers of the first century. The result was an objective confidence in the Gospel narratives which "bear their own stamp of truth" and a facile "clarifying" of difficult passages.[104]

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[98] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[101] Furness, *Resurrection*, pp. 32f.

## Theodore Parker[105]

Although Norton had been willing to go farther than

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[102] See Furness, Jesus, pp. 29-33.

[103] Ibid., pp. 15f.

[104] Furness rejects the apocalypticism of the "coming of the Son of Man" sayings as honest misunderstandings of the Evangelists, who failed to apprehend Jesus' spiritual meaning. See ibid., pp. 200-212.

[105] The best biography of Parker is Octavius B. Frothingham, Theodore Parker, a Biography (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1874). A recent work which excellently illuminates his reform efforts is Henry S. Commager, Theodore Parker, Yankee Crusader (Boston: Beacon Press, 1947). By far the ablest treatment of his critical theological development is John E. Dirks, The Critical Theology of Theodore Parker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

Stuart in his acceptance of the German higher criticism, he nevertheless repudiated its extremer speculations. His conservative views on the miracles led to extensive debates with Harvard alumni who had studied under him. Conspicuous among his opponents was a former student of his who had felt the exciting pulse of German romanticism and was in front rank of the American transcendentalists: Theodore Parker (1810-1860).

Parker's contribution to the history of ideas in America is difficult to exaggerate. He was the master of nineteen or twenty languages, extraordinarily learned in many fields, and possessed of a vast scholarly energy.[106] While he nowhere gives a carefully studied account of Jesus, he treats Gospel criticism with acute learning. Although Stuart and Norton had introduced German biblical criticism to America, Parker was "the first American scholar to have an appreciation of the far-reaching importance of historical criticism, especially in the biblical field."[107] And, more remarkably, this aspect of his studies was pursued amid his preaching duties, social reform efforts, and literary endeavors.

Parker was not an original or independent thinker as much as a discerning appropriator. He owed much, in his views of biblical criticism, as well as his theology, to German minds. In a day when German biblical criticism was generally assailed in America, Parker embraced it without reserve.[108] In 1843 his translation of DeWette's Einleitung appeared,[109] a symbolic tribute to the influence of German historical science on his biblical criticism. In his approach to the Gospels, Parker was equally devoted to historical criticism. He is thus a pioneer and a herald of higher criticism in America.

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[106] Parrington, op. cit., p. 414. Cf. Commager, op. cit., pp. 121-50.

[107] Schneider, op. cit., p. 229.

The character of Parker's liberal theology, which had affinities with Kant and Schleiermacher, militated against a pervasive concern for Jesus' life. He viewed religion as a natural and innate faculty of man.[110] The truths of religion were self-evident, like the axioms of geometry. They did not depend on the infallible authority of the Bible or the nature or authority of Christ.[111] In his famous sermon,

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[108] Dirks, op. cit., pp. 56f.

[109] W. M. L. DeWette, A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament, trans. and enlarged by Theodore Parker (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1843).

[110] Theodore Parker, A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion (London: J. Watson, 1850) [hereafter cited as Discourse], p. 155.

[111] Conrad Wright, Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing-Emerson-Parker (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 36f.

"The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," preached in 1841, Parker declared that the permanent element of religion is the pure religion that Jesus taught:

> . . . Christianity is a simple thing, very simple. It is absolute, pure morality; absolute, pure religion,--the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance.[112]

His doctrines are so manifestly true that they do not require the imprimatur of his life:

> So if it could be proved--as it cannot--in opposition to the greatest amount of historical evidence ever collected on any similar point, that the Gospels were the fabrication of designing and artful men, that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived, still Christianity would stand firm and fear no evil. None of the doctrines of that religion would fall to the ground; for, if true, they stand by themselves.[113]

Having thus removed the axis of truth from the man Jesus to his naked words, Parker is theologically prepared for any negative conclusions about the history of Jesus. Not surprisingly, then, he views the Gospels as quite defective in their historical testimony. The errors of memory, reduced perspective, and misunderstanding, common to all historians, are to be found in the Gospels, as well as the grosser distortions of a mythical and legendary character.[114]

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[112] Theodore Parker, Views of Religion (fifth edition; Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1900), p. 315.

[113] Ibid., p. 308.

[114] Parker, Discourse, pp. 158-62.

Highly influenced by Strauss, Parker saw the bare outline of Jesus' life surrounded by "a mass of truth and error."[115] Like Strauss, though in a different way, Parker could maintain the independence of Christian faith from the historical validity of the Gospels. Of Jesus' character, Parker, while acknowledging the limitations of the Gospels as historical sources, gives a rather full estimate.[116]

From his treatment of Jesus' life his historiographical viewpoint emerges. More than any other single critic, he was willing to submit the Gospels to the kind of historical investigation which Ranke was then proposing in Germany in other fields. As he saw the Gospels embarrassed by the light of scientific history, he appropriated the category of myth from Strauss, taking refuge in a transcendental-idealist theology which secured the truth of Christianity, though it partially sacrificed its historical character.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The historiography which dominated American study of Jesus until well into the nineteenth century was that of viewing the Gospels as basically historical in character. Both the supernaturalists and the rationalists directed their defenses or attacks, respectively, on this assumption. This state of affairs arose out of what may be termed historical innocence or apathy. The dogmatic systems, regarding the Bible as the receptacle of a body of divinity, retarded the view of the Bible as a historically-conditioned record emerging from the dynamic, teeming history of specific places and cultures. While the rationalist approach roiled the waters of supernatural history, it largely replaced supernaturalism with a historically aloof, static conception of truth. In either case, historical method was not consistently applied to the study of Jesus' life. Through Stuart and Robinson, philological studies paved the way for a gradual assimilation of higher criticism as it was being pioneered in Germany. In Parker, the full impact of the historical-critical approach to the Gospels may be seen. He thereby serves admirably as a transition figure, standing on the edge of a new era in American biblical study. His early acceptance of higher criticism as practiced in Germany should not, however, be seen as a barometer of the times. He was regarded as a radical even by his Unitarian brethren. His positive response to the mythical view of Jesus' life was never followed by many American scholars. The acceptance of historical criticism in America was to be postponed for decades by the inertia of tradition, the recoil of fear, and the genuine apprehensions of thoughtful men who wondered where it would ultimately lead.

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[115] Ibid., p. 162.

[116] Parker, Discourse, pp. 185-91.

## CHAPTER III

## THE GATHERING OF HISTORICAL TOOLS: HIGHER CRITICISM'S ADVENT, 1865-1900

The American Civil War marks a historical watershed in the national life.[1] Besides the radical power shift from agrarian to urban centers and the gathering momentum of the industrial revolution, there occurred about this time a decisive shift in the intellectual climate. The American colleges, with their stress on classical studies and "mental discipline," began to yield to the university system, with its more scientifically oriented curriculum.[2] The study of geology, biology, and other natural sciences accelerated proportionately. In biblical and theological studies, the German critical influence brought about the advent of historical criticism, triggering a belated, but fiercely intense, period of storm. The lives of Jesus, which mounted to a steady stream in last years of the century, faithfully mirrored the transitional state of biblical studies. Though most of them paid scant attention to the formal issues being raised by Continental criticism, they were profoundly affected by the historical modes of thought which were permeating nearly all aspects of nineteenth century scholarship. It is this fact which necessitates a survey of the birth and development of higher criticism in America. This chapter will trace the background of higher criticism and its resultant impact upon the historiography of American study of Jesus.

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[1] See the chronological structure of the definitive bibliography of American history: Oscar Handlin and others, Harvard Guide to American History (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 401-20; 434-49.

[2] George P. Schmidt, "Colleges in Ferment," AHR, LIX (1953-54), 19-42.

## I. THE HISTORICAL REVOLUTION: RECOVERY OF THE PAST

There was experienced in the nineteenth century a transformation so basic in historical thinking that it can only be described as revolutionary.[3] The rationalistic captivity of history was supplanted by a growing awareness of the particularity and uniqueness of each successive age of the past. Evolutionary concepts of change and development in the richly-varied cultures of the past were increasingly recognized. Interest in archaeology quickened; geography, philology, anthropology, and history became flourishing disciplines. Nowhere did this revolution prosper more than in Germany, and it was to that country that America owed its chief debt of historical awakening. Between 1820 and 1920, nearly nine thousand American students entered the seminars, laboratories, and lecture halls of Germany,[4] effecting a substantial transfer of scientific historiography to America. Not unnaturally, the historical awakening was felt in American theology and biblical studies, as well as in other fields. This awakening was evidenced by the growing vigor of such disciplines as archaeology, philology, and the history of religions. Recognizing the influence of these disciplines upon the study of the life of Jesus, their development will be briefly traced.

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[3] Alan Richardson, History Sacred and Profane (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 103-9.

## Archaeology and Geography: Places of the Past

Although Edward Robinson[5] had studied under the German geographer Ritter, his own epoch-making journeys, begun in 1838, entitle him to the honor of "founder of scientific topography of Palestine."[6] In his careful researches he united the studies of extant traditions, written topographical information, and accurate personal observation.[7] His labors reveal a growing historical approach to biblical study.

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[4] Jurgen Herbst, The German Historical School in American Scholarship (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 1. Cf. W. Stull Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America," JHI, I (1940), 355f.

[5] Cf. ante, pp. 20-23.

[6] W. F. Albright, The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible (second edition; New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), p. 19. Cf. the work of H. B. Hackett, Illustrations of Scripture Suggested by a Tour through the Holy Land (Boston: Heath and Graves, 1856). The value of this work is its contribution to a developing historical empathy rather than critical insight.

The pioneer work of Robinson was followed by a scholarly vacuum in America, however. Doubtless the work of the French, German, and English archaeologists influenced the general climate of thought, but after Robinson, it was not until 1891 that Jones Bliss, an American, contributed to archaeological research.[8] The first American orientalist to be regarded by competent European judges as equal to any in the field was James H. Breasted,[9] whose greatest achievements were in the early twentieth century. The most important work in archaeology by Americans was likewise delayed until that century. There was, however, a growing historical interest that cannot be measured by expeditions alone. This growing interest was destined to intensify the study of the *Umwelt* of the historical Jesus.

## *Oriental Philology*: *The Language of the Past*

The early industry of Stuart and Robinson in philology has been previously discussed.[10] Both scholars were stimulated by the earlier labors of the Germans. Linguistic studies were pursued as the means of a scientific approach to the languages of antiquity. As the ancient Levant was being illumined by archaeological light, the coins, inscriptions, and manuscripts which were unearthed demanded translation.

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[7] Albright, *loc. cit.*

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 24f.

[9] W. F. Albright, "James Henry Breasted, Humanist," *History, Archaeology, and Christian Humanism* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 227.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, American Semitic study reached its zenith. Between 1875 and 1885, a remarkably vigorous decade of Assyrian studies flourished.[11] At Harvard, David Gordon Lyon taught Hebrew and Assyriology[12] and published an Assyrian grammar in 1886.[13] Charles A. Briggs, professor at Union Seminary in New York from 1874 to 1913, was, among other scholarly distinctions, an able Hebraist, as his work in lexicography reveals.[14] Also at Union, and a former student of Briggs, was Francis Brown, who edited the English translation of Gesenius' Hebrew grammar and taught Assyriology.[15] The foremost teacher of Hebrew in the last decades of the century was William Rainey Harper, who taught at Baptist Union Seminary and Yale and was the first president of the University of Chicago. Under Harper, Hebrew became a popular elective,[16] a rather solid achievement for any linguist. Breasted was his pupil, and with Harper's encouragement, prepared himself for a renowned career in Egyptology.[17] It is indicative of the stature of American Semitic scholars that over half of the Old Testament volumes of the "International Critical Commentary Series" were entrusted to their hands.[18]

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[10] Cf. _ante_, pp. 18-23.

[11] C. F. Thwing, _The American and the German University_ (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 191.

[12] R. Lazzaro, "Theological Scholarship at Harvard from 1880 to 1953," _The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture_, George Williams, editor (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954), p. 252.

[13] D. G. Lyon, _An Assyrian Manual: For the Use of Beginners in the Study of the Assyrian Language_ (Chicago: The American Publication Society of Hebrew, 1886).

[14] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs,

Greek study in America was also vigorous. Notable in the biblical field was Joseph H. Thayer, whose translation

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_A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic_ (based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Edward Robinson; corrected impression of the first edition of 1907; Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1952).

[15] Thwing, _loc_. _cit_.

[16] _Ibid_., p. 192.

[17] A. C. McGiffert, Jr., _No Ivory Tower_: _The Story of the Chicago Theological Seminary_ (Chicago: The Chicago Theological Seminary, 1965), p. 77.

[18] B. S. Easton, "America's Contribution to New Testament Science," _ET_, XLII (1930-31), 267.

and revision of the Grimm-Wilke lexicon[19] was long a standard work. Marvin Vincent's Word Studies[20] were also important lexicographical contributions. Burton, a colleague of Harper's at Chicago, produced a study of the moods and tenses of New Testament Greek which remains a classic.[21] There were, besides these mentioned, a sturdy band of linguists in many theological centers who taught with solid competence.[22] In this linguistic activity there was an underlying historical concern. It was felt, often half consciously perhaps, that the science of language would help unlock the treasures of the past.[23] As an American historian phrased it in 1889: "The modern scientific study everywhere has a tap-root running down into philology."[24] In the study of Jesus, philological studies were soon to have important consequences on such questions as the Aramaic background of Jesus' teaching.

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[19] J. H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti (fourth edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951). First edition published in 1886.

[20] Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (4 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887-1900).

[21] E. D. Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (fifth edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1903). First published in 1888 as a pamphlet. This work has gone through many printings, the latest being in 1955.

[22] A noteworthy example is the work of John A. Broadus of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Broadus had been trained at the University of Virginia by Gessner Harrison, the first American classical scholar to adopt the methods of comparative philology. Broadus' influence was formative upon his most outstanding student, A. T. Robertson. Cf. Edgar V. McKnight, "A. T. Robertson's Contribution to the Interpretation of the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1960), pp. 74f.

[23] One finds a mood of ebullient optimism running

## The History of Religions: The Religious Past

The advance of nineteenth century archaeology and philology turned scholarship to the study of the history of religions.[25] While American study cannot compare with the energy of European study in the nineteenth century, there was a growing interest in ancient religions. James F. Clarke was an early advocate of comparative religion, although his approach was more concerned with theology than with history.[26] More substantial was the work of C. H. Toy

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through a work such as A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (fifth edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931). See esp. pp. 3-30.

[24] The historian was Charles K. Adams, reporting to the American Historical Association, quoted by Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

[25] A. Eustace Haydon, "History of Religions," *Religious Thought in the Last Quarter-Century*, G. B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 141.

[26] James F. Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1871).

at Harvard.[27] Toy was a creative researcher in the history of religions approach,[28] and inspired interest in that field among such students as David G. Lyon and George Foot Moore.[29]

The study of ancient religions was a disciplined effort of nineteenth century historians to establish contact with the variegated human past. As the religion of Israel was seen to share so profoundly in the conceptual world of the Near East, emphasis on a static biblical theology began to yield to a developmental scheme. Historical study, which had for centuries been thwarted by dogmatic considerations, now boldly pronounced its *mene tekel* on theology.[30] If J. M. Powis Smith, in a survey of Old Testament study in the quarter-century between 1900 and 1925, could affirm that the period "marked the transfer from books on 'theology' to those on the 'history of religions,'"[31] it was only because the transfer had been prepared for by the historical awakening of the late nineteenth century. The new interest in comparative religions, like the archaeological and philological awakening, was to have a far-reaching effect on the study of Jesus.

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[27] Pope A. Duncan, "Crawford Howell Toy, Heresy at Louisville," *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials*, George H. Shriver, editor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 77.

[28] See Toy's bibliography in Billy G. Hurt, "Crawford Howell Toy: Interpreter of the Old Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1965). This interest issued in Toy's *Introduction to the History of Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

[29] Duncan, *loc. cit.* Toy founded the Harvard Club for the Study of the History of Religions in 1891. He was presented a *Festschrift* by his students in 1912 which was devoted to that field. See D. G. Lyon and G. F. Moore (eds.), *Studies in the History of Religions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

[30] An insightful tracing of this movement may be seen in James Smart, "The Death and Rebirth of Old Testament Theology," *JR*, XXIII (1943), 1-11.

## II. THE EMERGENCE OF HIGHER CRITICISM

The growth of historical criticism altered the dominant historiography of American biblical scholarship, directly affecting the study of Jesus' life. For this reason, it is necessary to trace the development of higher criticism in America.

### Pioneers of Criticism

The story of higher criticism's advent in America has not yet been adequately told. Partial accounts may be gathered from a number of sources.[32] The impulse toward the new criticism was almost entirely German in origin. Although the powerful influence of Andrews Norton stymied the advance of thorough-going historical criticism at Harvard, Charles Follen, a German refugee who taught ethics and church history there from 1828 to 1830,[33] expounded German theology to his students. George Ripley, who later debated with Norton concerning the miracles, and Theodore Parker, "America's Strauss,"[34] were two who eagerly responded to his influence.

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[31] J. M. P. Smith, "Old Testament Interpretation," Religious Thought in the Last Quarter-Century, G. B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 18.

[32] An excellent account of the effect of historical criticism on the Presbyterian church in America can be found in Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of

Philip Schaff introduced America to a mild form of German biblical criticism in his editing of a translation[35] of J. P. Lange's Bibelwerk between 1864 and 1880. His history of the Apostolic Church had been the first work published in America (1853) that treated the subject from a really historical viewpoint.[36] His efforts in translating

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Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954). For the Baptist response to higher criticism, see Norman Maring, "Baptists and Changing Views of the Bible, 1865-1918 (Part I)," Found, I (July, 1958), 52-75; (Part II), (October, 1958), 30-61.

[33] Conrad Wright, "The Early Period (1811-1840)," The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture, George H. Williams, editor (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954), p. 53.

[34] Cf. ante, pp. 44-48.

[35] J. P. Lange, A Commentary on Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal, Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students, ed. and trans. P. Schaff (24 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1864-80).

[36] Easton, op. cit., p. 27.

and editing the second edition of Herzog's Realencyklopädie, which appeared in English between 1882 and 1884, aided the cause of a moderate critical approach. On the specific issue of biblical criticism, however, Schaff's views may be best termed mediating. Despite these earlier rumblings, the chief impact of higher criticism on America was delayed until the last quarter of the century.[37]

The turbulence of the last part of the nineteenth century was increased by the American awareness of the situation in England.[38] In 1860 the publication of Essays and Reviews had alerted Britain to the presence of the enemy on their own side of the Channel. Bishop Colenso's treatise on the Pentateuch, which followed two years later, confirmed the fact. The trial of W. Robertson Smith of the Scottish Free Church in 1881 on charges of heretical views of the Bible thrust the issues of higher criticism before American eyes.[39]

Preceding the infamous American heresy trials was a period of intensive debate upon matters related to the new criticism. Briggs aired the issues in his inaugural as Professor of Hebrew at Union in 1876.[40] A series of articles, pro and con, soon followed in the *Presbyterian Review* from 1881 to 1883. William Rainey Harper debated for biblical criticism against W. Henry Green in *Hebraica* from 1888 to 1890.[41] This volatile kind of discussion, with such crucial bearing on questions regarded as matters of religious conviction, issued in a series of heresy trials, both formal and informal.

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[37] Loetscher, op. cit., pp. 18-29.

[38] A full presentation of the coming of higher criticism to England and its effect on the Evangelicals may be found in Willis B. Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (London: Independent Press, Limited, 1954).

[39] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 29.

C. H. Toy was ". . . the first to suffer for the Higher Criticism in the United States."[42] His acceptance of a critical approach to the Old Testament led to the Southern Baptist Seminary's trustees' acceptance of his tendered resignation in 1879.[43] Soon his fate was shared by a distinguished roster of American biblical scholars.

The influence of Charles A. Briggs upon the Presbyterian acceptance of higher criticism is widely recognized. Briggs had gone to study in Germany in 1866 with definite predilections toward biblical conservatism.[44] He was forced to abandon this cause, however, and adopted a frankly critical approach to the Bible.[45] This outlook, reflected in his famous inaugural address of 1891, led to his heresy trial in 1893. The chief issues at stake were the nature of biblical authority, infallibility, and verbal inspiration. Briggs' friend and ally, Henry P. Smith, professor at Lane Seminary, had been tried during the same panic on similar issues in 1892.[46]

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[40] C. A. Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 287.

[41] Maring, *op. cit.* (Part II), p. 31.

[42] Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

[43] Duncan, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-69.

Although not radical by any means in his critical conclusions, Ezra Gould was dismissed from Newton in 1882.[47] Nathaniel Schmidt, author of a life of Jesus,[48] experienced a similar fate at Colgate in 1896.[49] A. C. McGiffert, though not a biblical professor, became another victim of anti-higher criticism while at Union. At the opening of the new century the storm had not passed. George H. Gilbert, professor of New Testament at Chicago Theological Seminary, had moved from a reserved acceptance of higher criticism to a wholehearted embrace, and, climaxing a heated controversy with the seminary directors, resigned in 1900.[50]

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[44] Max G. Rogers, "Charles Augustus Briggs: Heresy at Union," _American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials_, G. Shriver, editor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 90.

[45] See Loetscher, _op. cit._, pp. 29-62, for a very high estimate of Briggs' leadership in introducing higher criticism to Presbyterian circles.

[46] _Ibid._, pp. 63-68.

[47] Maring, _op. cit._, p. 64.

[48] Cf. _post_, pp. 89-91.

[49] Winthrop Hudson, _Religion in America_ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 278.

But in spite of the personal misfortunes of these advocates of criticism, the tide was plainly turning. The leading American scholars were forming a powerful consensus of approval for higher criticism. Orello Cone, Universalist scholar and president of Buchtel College, for example, was a highly able exponent of critical biblical study who enjoyed an international reputation.[51] His book in the field of Gospel criticism[52] was considered the finest American work on the subject yet to appear.[53]

The Divinity School of the University of Chicago, which had come into being as the incorporation of the Baptist

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[50] McGiffert, op. cit., pp. 115-24. Gilbert's work, Interpretation of the Bible: A Short History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), traces the history of interpretation and reveals his own approval of historical criticism.

[51] Cone and Nathaniel Schmidt are the only American critics who are mentioned in Schweitzer's account of the Quest. See Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 267, 278.

[52] Orello Cone, Gospel Criticism and Historical Christianity (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1891).

[53] John M. Atwood, "Cone, Orello," DAB, IV, 341. Of this relatively little-known scholar's work on Paul (Paul: The Man, the Missionary, the Teacher [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898]), Atwood says, without documentation, that H. J. Holtzmann declared it the best available estimate of Paul in any language. See ibid.

Union Theological Seminary into the University in 1891,[54] was a powerful voice for higher criticism. Shailer Mathews, William Rainey Harper, and Ernest DeWitt Burton advocated historico-critical study there in the last years of the century. The contribution of the University was not to scholarly circles alone. The fruits of their critical scholarship were intentionally beamed toward the lay public.[55]

As late as 1881-84, young B. W. Bacon discerned in his biblical professors at Yale a refusal to deal with the problems raised by historical criticism.[56] When he became New Testament professor there in 1896, he came thoroughly committed to those principles which had been neglected. His Introduction to the New Testament[57] (1900) was his early formulation of this approach. Appearing in the same year was Henry S. Nash's History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament. The subtitle of his book was an accurate indication that, by 1900, higher criticism had come to America to stay.[58]

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[54] McGiffert, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

[55] See *The Hebrew Student*, 1882-83; *The Old Testament Student*, 1883-89; *The Old and New Testament Student*, 1889-92; and *The Biblical World*, 1893-1920. These journals were successive stages of the Chicago Divinity School's journal, edited by Harper until his death in 1906. A survey of the contents of these journals reveals a large number of articles which aim toward disseminating critical research. Harper's sheer energy in advancing biblical study on collegiate, ministerial, and lay levels is described in Clyde Votaw, "In the Popularization of Biblical Study," *BW*, XXVII (1906), 209-15, one of several articles commemorating Harper in the March 1906 issue of *BW*.

[56] B. W. Bacon, "Enter the Higher Criticism," *Contemporary American Theology: Theological Autobiographies*, V. Ferm, editor (New York: Round Table Press, 1932), I, 3-5.

[57] B. W. Bacon, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900).

## Higher Criticism and Liberal Theology

In America, as in Germany, historical criticism grew in symbiosis with liberal theology.[59] Viewed against the Protestant scholastic conception of the Bible as an absolute body of truth, case-hardened by the dogmatic principle of verbal infallibility, any view that seriously allows for divine-human confluence in the production of the Bible could conceivably be termed liberal. But the admission of varying degrees of human factors in the Bible by nineteenth century critics not generally regarded as "liberal" demands a firmer definition of liberalism. In American Christianity, liberalism describes a religious movement which reached its zenith during the first three decades of the twentieth century.[60] It was characterized by an emphasis upon continuity in the world, the autonomy of human reason and experience rather than divine revelation, and the dynamic nature of life and the world.[61] Gathered around this cluster of ideas were liberal leaders whose thought spread across a full spectrum of beliefs. Generally, American liberals may be divided into two groups: the evangelical liberals and the modernistic liberals.[62]

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[58] Henry S. Nash, The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament: Being the History of the Process Whereby the Word of God Has Won the Right to be Understood (New Testament Handbooks. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900).

[59] Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins: A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 61. Cf. Maurice Jones, The New Testament in the Twentieth Century: A Survey of Recent Christological and Historical Criticism of the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1914), p. 14.

At stake in the struggle of historical criticism for a hearing was the whole question of religious authority. To see the Bible as conditioned profoundly by historical circumstances served to break down the view of absolute infallibility. This fact defines the threat which higher criticism posed to traditional views of the Bible. But, portending eventual crises, this threat was met with greater concern and foreboding in America than in England.[63] The English evangelicals were prepared for a more graceful acceptance of higher criticism by scholars who embodied both a critical approach to the Bible and orthodox theology.[64] In America, despite the theological moderation of many who embraced higher criticism,[65] historical criticism became identified with radical theological tendencies.

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[60] Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 3.

[61] Ibid., p. 6.

[62] So Cauthen, ibid., pp. 26-33, following Van Dusen. Cf. the similar division made by F. H. Foster, The Modern Movement in American Theology (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1939), pp. 188-211.

[63] This judgment is confirmed by Willis B. Glover, Evangelical Non-Conformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (London: Independent Press, 1954), p. 248.

One indication to the orthodox that higher criticism was subversive of Christianity was the strand of radical historical skepticism which seemed to be its ultimate tendency. Abroad, they could point to D. F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer, whose skepticism was fearfully climaxed in the "Jesus or Christ" and "Christ-Myth" debates.[66]

Furthermore, the effect of historical skepticism, which seemed to go hand in glove with higher criticism, was becoming discernible in America at the close of the century. George Burman Foster, the Ritschlian theologian at the University of Chicago, and Frank Hugh Foster were aware enough of the difficulty of absolutely proving the historicity of Jesus that they subordinated the historians' account of Jesus' life to his "worth."[67] Frank Porter, professor at

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[64] _Ibid_., pp. 108-29.

[65] Men such as Briggs, Clarke, Nash, and Gould represent theological viewpoints which could not be considered radical.

[66] Weinel and Widgery, _op_. _cit_., pp. 430-47.

[67] Foster, _op_. _cit_., pp. 201-9. The empirical modern-

Yale, felt obliged to defend the validity of the movement back to Jesus against the charge of its impossibility as a historical task.[68] These unsettling concessions to extreme historical skepticism were eventually climaxed by D. C. Macintosh's negative answer to the question posed in his article of 1911: "Is Belief in the Historicity of Jesus Indispensable to Christian Faith?"[69] And if the orthodox were nervous about the historical implications that appeared to lie in so desperate an apologetic, their worst suspicions were confirmed by the outright denial of Jesus' historicity by William B. Smith, a professor of mathematics at Tulane University. Smith's Christ-myth theory, participating in a larger international debate, was propounded in two books which were first published in German.[70] Although Smith was

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ism which dominated the Divinity School of the University of Chicago before the turn of the century was accompanied by a total acceptance of historico-critical method. Liberal theology could thereby be construed as a binding correlate of higher criticism by conservative minds. Cf. Daniel D. Williams, "Tradition and Experience in American Theology," *The Shaping of American Religion* (Vol. I of *Religion in American Life*, eds. A. Leland Jamison and James W. Smith. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 459-68.

[68] Frank C. Porter, "The Sufficiency of the Religion of Jesus," *AJT*, XI (1907), 75.

[69] D. C. Macintosh, "Is Belief in the Historicity of Jesus Indispensable to Christian Faith?" *AJT*, XV (1911), 362-72.

[70] William B. Smith, *Der vorchristliche Jesus nebst*

refuted by Shirley Jackson Case,[71] himself a thorough liberal, the image of a necessary alliance between higher criticism and a liberal theology was never dispelled. This image was to remain a serious barrier to the acceptance of higher criticism on into the twentieth century.

## Higher Criticism Conceived as a Science

The advent of higher criticism in America corresponded to the transfer of German historical thought to America. This was not fortuitous. Just as it was German-trained historians who planted the conception of scientific history in American universities,[72] so the pioneers of biblical criticism in America were directly or indirectly shaped by German critical thought.

Critical historical investigation on the graduate level in American universities is usually said to have begun in 1876 at Johns Hopkins University.[73] In the last two

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weiteren Vorstudien zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Urchristentums (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1906); Ecce Deus: Die urchristliche Lehre des reingöttlichen Jesu (Jena: E. Diedrich, 1911). For a brief summary of his views see William B. Smith, "The Pre-Christian Jesus," AJT, XV (1911), 259-65.

[71] Shirley J. Case, "The Historicity of Jesus: An Estimate of the Negative Argument," AJT, XV (1911), 20-42. Cf. Case, The Historicity of Jesus (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912), pp. 62-88.

[72] Herbst, op. cit., pp. 99f.

[73] John H. Randall, Jr., and George Haines, IV, "Con-

decades of the nineteenth century the discipline fully established itself. The leaders of this movement acknowledged full indebtedness to German historical thought,[74] of which the greatest representative was Ranke. Among these historians was a dominant belief that history was a science.[75] In the closing quarter of the nineteenth century the prestige of science was so towering that many disciplines sought to share in its glory (e.g., Christian Science, "library science," "domestic science").[76] The "scientific" historians had essentially two models, both drawn from the realm of natural science. The first was the concept of law. Henry Adams, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1894, could speak of a feeling, held by most serious historians, ". . . that they stood on the brink of a great generalization that would reduce all history under a law as clear as the laws which govern the material world. . . ."[77] The other model was the stance of

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trolling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians," Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography (Bulletin 54. New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), p. 23.

[74] Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (second edition; New York: Dover Publications, Incorporated, 1962), p. 259.

[75] Holt, op. cit., p. 352.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Quoted in ibid., p. 357.

complete objectivity, associated with Ranke.[78] The scholarly ideal was to divest oneself of all presuppositions in order to describe history as it actually happened.

During this period, American theologians came to share in varying degrees the presuppositions of "scientific" history. Ephraim Emerton, who assumed the chair of church history at Harvard in 1882, insisted upon the removal of all theological presuppositions in the quest for objectivity.[79] Describing the historical method which should prevail in the history seminar, he could sanguinely declare that ". . . the claim of history to rank among sciences is founded in fact--the fact that it has a scientific method."[80] Another church historian, Frank H. Foster, writing at Oberlin Seminary in 1888, expressed a similar viewpoint: "History is a science, which, like every other science, takes the facts peculiar to its sphere, reduces them to order, and gives them their due understanding."[81] Speaking of the inductive nature of historical knowledge, Foster added: "History rests on a knowledge of the facts which holds them in a perfect mastery."[82]

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[78] *Ibid*., p. 355. [79] Lazzaro, *op*. *cit*., p. 261.

[80] Ephraim Emerton, "The Historical Seminar in American Teaching," *Methods of Teaching History*, G. Stanley Hall, editor (Boston: Ginn, Heath and Company, 1885), p. 197. For a similar stance see Emerton's presidential address to the American Society of Church History in 1921: "A Definition of Church History," *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, Second Series, Vol. VII, ed. F. W. Loetscher (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923), esp. pp. 55-57.

[81] Frank H. Foster, *The Seminary Method of Original Study in the Historical Sciences Illustrated from Church History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), p. 7.

While most biblical critics did not so clearly identify their presuppositions, there is ample indication that both their assumptions and method rested on a similar basis. Briggs fell under the spell of biblical theology in his studies at Göttingen in the 1860's,[83] and his efforts to inaugurate a complete programme of biblical theology in America served to protect him from the excesses of historicism. But in advocating a critical approach, he reveals a high estimate of its scientific status: "No one need fear criticism, save those who are uncertain in their knowledge; for criticism leads to certitude."[84] He realized that the religious commitment of the critic colored his results, but he remained optimistic:

> . . . The normal development of the investigation is the calm, steady, invincible march of science. The Higher Criticism has its scientific principles by which it determines all these questions.[85]

Henry S. Nash likewise commended higher criticism from a stance of "reverent" liberalism. Acknowledging the religiously unique dimension of the Bible, he nevertheless affirmed that it ". . . must come within the reach of the scientific reason."[86] B. W. Bacon recognized that although practitioners of biblical criticism might differ on specific results, they were fully agreed on scientific methodology. The critics' diverse conclusions only awaited a more perfect objectivity of judgment:

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[82] Ibid., p. 8.

[83] Rogers, op. cit., p. 91.

[84] Charles A. Briggs, General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 80.

[85] Ibid., p. 95.

> The perfect balance of evidence in detailed results remains for him who shall be able to join to the amplest scholarship an impartiality of judgment absolute not only in intention, but in fact.[87]

This impartiality of judgment was seen as the enabling factor in arriving at an accurate life of Jesus:

> It is the task of the historical critic in the New Testament to gently disentangle this primitive thread [Petrine narrative], extricating it from all the web of pious legend, exaggeration, misunderstanding, which devout imagination has woven about it, that we may know the plain, bald facts, just the events as they occurred. . . .[88]

The aspiration for a scientific biblical criticism is complete in Gilbert:

> The new method of interpretation is Historical Criticism. Its sole aim is to get at the facts and to learn their meaning. It is a scientific method, for it involves, as Adeney has said, "a rigorous exclusion of mere assumptions, a full and careful induction of all the evidence, a strict, unbiassed process of arriving

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[86] Nash, op. cit., p. 85.

[87] B. W. Bacon, An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), p. 25.

[88] B. W. Bacon, "Ultimate Problems of Biblical Science," JBL, XXII (1903), 13.

> at conclusions, and an orderly arrangement and classification of the knowledge thus attained.[89]

Before the advent of historical criticism, the Gospels were largely regarded as objective records. In the new criticism, the records were recognized as profoundly subjective, but the historian assumed an acute degree of objectivity. Historical innocence gave way to "innocent" historians.

## III. HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN THE STUDY OF JESUS' LIFE

Although historical criticism was seen as a scientific tool, the implications of that view were, at first, seldom carried through by a rigorous methodology. In fact many critics seem to have assumed that their mere release from traditionalism raised their resultant views to the level of scientific objectivity. In the transition years of higher criticism this objectivity was usually not of a deliberately reasoned, positivistic kind. It was, rather, one manifestation of the optimistic wave of progress--a conception which unconsciously, but tangibly, colored late nineteenth century modes of thought.[90] Thus, the quest to recover the real history of Jesus was confidently launched, a quest which revealed controlling historiographical assumptions of various kinds. To these assumptions closer attention must now be given.

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[89] George H. Gilbert, Interpretation of the Bible: A Short History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), p. 266.

[90] J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into

### *Largely Reliable Gospels*

That many avowedly higher critics applied an extremely mild form of criticism to the Gospels makes the broad rejection of criticism in America an intriguing riddle. The existence of this mediating group may be documented by their approach to the life of Jesus. Ezra Gould is an example. In his commentary on Mark in the "International Critical Commentary,"[91] he accepted the Gospels as giving generally contemporaneous history of Jesus.[92] Although John has more subjective elements than the Synoptics, it too contains ". . . more or less actual discourse."[93] Gould assured his contemporaries that criticism had accepted the historical character of the Gospels as based on two eye-witness

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*Its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1920), pp. 334-52.

[91] Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (The International Critical Commentary. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896) [hereafter cited as *Mark*].

[92] *Ibid*., p. xliii.

[93] Ezra P. Gould, *The Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (New Testament Handbooks. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), p. 7.

sources.[94] Even more happily:

> Criticism thus confines itself at present--and this may be taken as an ultimate position--to the details of these documents, and has ceased to attack, or even to minimize, the historicity of the documents themselves.[95]

George B. Stevens, who, like Gould, wrote a New Testament theology, accepted the substantial reliability of the Gospels while also accepting a critical approach. He followed the two-source theory, attributing both sources to eyewitnesses: "We have, then, an apostolic basis for our first three Gospels which entitles them, in a purely historical judgment, to make a strong claim to trustworthiness."[96] Although the Fourth Gospel may have embodied subjective elements, ". . . it is penetrated by a keen historic interest and bears all the marks of a faithful portrayal of the essence and import of our Lord's words and deeds."[97]

William N. Clarke, whose influential work on systematic theology was "the textbook of liberalism,"[98] held a high estimate of the Gospels as historical sources for the life of Jesus.[99] This estimation included a high regard for the miraculous elements of Jesus' life. Concerning his miraculous birth he wrote: "Believers in the living God can accept such a birth, if only a fit occasion for such an event appears, and the event is sufficiently attested."[100] Gould likewise saw the miracles established as credible by the eye-witness nature of the sources:

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[94] Gould, Mark, p. xliii. [95] Ibid.

[96] George B. Stevens, The Theology of the New Testament (The International Theological Library. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 7. Cf. Stevens, The Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 29.

[97] George B. Stevens, The Theology of the New Testament (The International Theological Library. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 173.

[98] Otto Heick, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), II, 469.

> This first-hand testimony is the starting point in establishing the credibility of the miracles. Then, they stand or fall with the historicity of the whole account of Jesus, which is not generally denied.[101]

Alfred W. Anthony, professor of New Testament at Cobb Divinity School, represents an extreme use of higher criticism in the interests of apologetic. While recognizing that the Gospels give only a partial account of Jesus' life,[102] he found in them the highest historical credibility. The eye-witness character of the sources and their chronological nearness to the recorded events argued for their historicity.[103] He denied the theory of mutual source dependence,[104] which accorded the Gospel parallels a striking corroborative evidence. It is significant that Anthony stated that his investigation was strictly objective:

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[99] William N. Clarke, An Outline of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), pp. 261-63.

[100] Ibid., p. 264.

[101] Gould, Mark, p. 34. Cf. p. xliii.

[102] Alfred W. Anthony, An Introduction to the Life of Jesus: An Investigation of the Historical Sources (Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1896), pp. 109ff.

[103] Ibid., pp. 114ff. [104] Ibid., p. 169.

> Let us, therefore, for the present be content to approach the record containing the details of that life without any theory. Let us look at the record in a purely historical spirit, and treat it as any other historical material.[105]

Although these critics acknowledged the claims of the new criticism, they found the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, to require a minimal degree of criticism. They assuredly were not prepared to follow the logic of historical criticism to its ultimate limits.

## Historical Source within the Sources

Toward the close of the nineteenth century, the labor of over a half-century on the Synoptic problem by German scholars was beginning to crystallize into the two-document hypothesis. This theory led American critics of the last decade of the century, as it did English critics,[106] to an extremely high valuation of Mark as a historical framework for the life of Jesus. It was assumed that within the mine of the Synoptic Gospels were golden veins of actual history. The task of the scientific investigator was to extract these primitive sources which, because of their greater chronological proximity to Jesus, still retained their historical purity. The sheer complexity of the task of isolating these sources reinforced the subtle assumption that the critic was drawing nearer to pure history.

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[105] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[106] Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

Orello Cone, for example, who was abreast of German Synoptic study, accepted Markan priority.[107] As the oldest source Mark was the most genuinely historical, a judgment which Cone found supported by Mark's internal characteristics:

> The source-criticism according to which Mark's Gospel is the oldest, and has been substantially taken up into the other two synoptics, finds confirmation in the fact that that record approaches more nearly a genuinely historical character than these.[108]

Although Cone saw Matthew and Luke as displaying Tendenzen, he felt that their substantial reliance on Mark saved them from the tendentious extremes imputed to them by Tübingen critics.[109]

George H. Gilbert sought to make his treatment of Jesus follow the scientific path of historical investigation.[110] In 1899, he regarded the Gospels themselves as generally reliable historical sources:

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[107] Orello Cone, Gospel Criticism and Historical Christianity: A Study of the Gospels and of the History of the Gospel Canon during the Second Century (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1891), pp. 322-23.

[108] Ibid., p. 322f.

[109] Ibid., pp. 291-305.

[110] George H. Gilbert, The Revelation of Jesus: A Study of the Primary Sources of Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), pp. vii-x.

> The revelation of Jesus, as has been said, is a subject for historical investigation. Its sources are the Gospels. The time is certainly past when any student need to apologize for regarding these documents as essentially trustworthy.[111]

But Gilbert came to accept the prevailing two-document theory, and his life of Jesus of 1912 is built upon it.[112] He thus illustrates the shift toward a search for historically reliable sources with the Gospels, a shift by one whose avowed aim was to scientifically ". . . get at the very facts."[113]

Gould, while finding all the Gospels largely reliable as historical documents, accepted the logia source and Mark as the basis of the Synoptic Gospels. Shailer Mathews also accepted the two-document theory of sources although, influenced by Burton, he thought the logia source might be multiple.[114]

Charles A. Briggs accepted the two-document theory, but combined it with a great facility in Semitic languages and a harmonistic penchant, producing a unique approach to Gospel history. Briggs' study from 1874 to 1891 was concentrated upon the Old Testament. Assuming the new chair of biblical theology at Union in 1891, he began a fresh study of the New Testament.[115] Briggs maintained that no one of the Gospels could be relied upon for chronological order,[116] but all retained genuine historical fragments which must be deftly combined by the harmonist. Thus Luke, the best historian of the New Testament,[117] who carefully checked the accuracy of the sources, could serve as a corrective to Mark. Briggs achieved a harmonizing reconstruction of Jesus' life, with an early Judean ministry. Thus, Mark's silence stemmed from Peter's absence from the first phase of the ministry. Briggs' method was eclectic. He did not assume that a given source was uniformly historical. Each of the Gospels incorporated actual history which must be carefully gleaned and fitted into a framework of history.

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[111] *Ibid*., p. viii. This work takes the same position regarding the sources as his earlier *The Student's Life of Jesus* (Chicago: Press of Chicago Theological Seminary, 1896).

[112] George H. Gilbert, *Jesus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

[113] George H. Gilbert, *The Student's Life of Jesus* (Chicago: Press of Chicago Theological Seminary, 1896), p. ix.

[114] Heber C. Snell, "American Research on Jesus," *RM*, I (1941), 539.

The general conclusions of the two-document theory became the basis for a constellation of indefinitely-formed historiographical presuppositions. Among them was the tacit consensus that an early document is a historical document and that Gospel development was from simple, "untheologized" primary sources to "theologically-overlaid" secondary sources.

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[115] Charles A. Briggs, New Light on the Life of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), p. viii.

[116] Ibid., p. 8.

[117] Ibid., p. 132.

## Internal Historical Credentials

Yet another "scientific" evidence of the historical value of the sources was the presence of certain qualities within the documents which were judged to be determinative in deciding historical accuracy. Orello Cone found his source-critical conclusions concerning Markan priority reinforced by the historical qualities within Mark:

> It is tolerably free from legendary narratives, and is throughout well arranged and self-consistent, though not always presenting a strictly chronological order. Of "tendency" and disturbing dogmatic interests there is almost no trace.[118]

Again, the Markan style, with its vivid, graphic delineation,[119] argued for its historical value: "Striving only to be natural and direct, Mark has unconsciously produced a picture."[120]

The uniqueness of the Evangelists' portrait of Jesus pointed to a genuinely historical account:

> The simple grandeur of his character, and the easily remembered teachings which he left, sententious, apho-

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[118] Cone, op. cit., p. 323. [119] Ibid., p. 168.

[120] Ibid.

> ristic expressions, according to the synoptic records, must have produced a tradition of great vividness and vitality to which history probably furnishes no parallel.[121]

These kinds of internal criteria are summarized by Cone:

> With this theory that Mark is the oldest of the Gospels agree the distinguishing internal character of his record, the absence of all that is prehistorical, the immediate beginning of the history with the coming of the Baptist, the undeveloped account of the temptation, the freedom from legendary interpolations in the history of the passion which are found in Matthew, the objectivity without theological intention and method, and especially the character of the immediate vivacity, picturesqueness, and clearness of the delineations and descriptions.[122]

Gould found the historicity of the miracles of Jesus confirmed by the "verisimilitude" of the miracle narrative.[123] They were stamped as integral to the Gospel narratives by their natural connection to historical events told by eyewitnesses: "One of the first principles of a true criticism is, that any attempt to patch out a story with unreal details will betray itself by the incongruities of the addition."[124]

These criteria of historical authenticity were apparently considered to be self-evident. Their probative force was so variously judged, however, that their value as objective tests is virtually non-existent. The history of the quest for "pillar passages" is an absorbing study, and its end, even in the era of the "New Quest," is not yet in sight.

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[121] *Ibid.*, p. 322. [122] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[123] Gould, *Mark*, p. xliii. [124] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

## Theological Predilections

Judgments about what is real history in the Gospels were profoundly influenced by theological "esthetics"--by what was considered Jesus' "necessary" character, outlook, and teachings. The subtle way in which subjective predilections can appear to be the results of objective study necessitates their treatment as historiographical presuppositions.

Cone viewed Jesus as a supremely great spiritual and ethical teacher: "As an embodiment and manifestation of whatever is noblest, purest, and tenderest in man, he stands unrivalled among the great religious teachers of the ages."[125] His view of the kingdom of God was of a timeless spiritual realm which would morally transform human society by a process of steady development.[126] Upon the basis of this conception of the kingdom, Cone was provided with an invaluable historical knife. Given the prevailing Ritschlian view of Jesus' outlook, he could trim off Matthew's Judaistic messianism and similar distortions which had encrusted the sources.[127] Cone was entirely prepared to submit to the close study of Jesus' thought-world,[128] but he saw the Jewish-apocalyptic milieu as affecting the Evangelists but not Jesus. Similarly, Cone freely attributed much that he found offensive in Jesus' acts or teachings to the Evangelists.[129] This method selects from the Gospels those features which appeal to *a priori* personal inclinations and, since they are found in the sources, invests them with historical credibility while explaining other elements as extraneous accretions. Its obvious liability is that it is guided by an unavoidably strong degree of subjectivism.

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[125] Cone, _op_. _cit_., p. 354.

[126] _Ibid_., p. 264.

[127] See _ibid_., pp. 254-90. Cf. his thesis in _The Gospel and Its Earliest Interpretations_: _A Study of the_

Shailer Mathews illustrates the biblical critic halting between modernizing and archaizing tendencies. His historical studies of the New Testament eschatology were among the first in America to recognize the pervasiveness of the apocalyptic element in Jesus' teaching,[130] yet his sociological interests made him an outstanding representative of the Social Gospel movement. Thus, he was at first prepared

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*Teaching of Jesus and Its Doctrinal Transformations in the New Testament* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893).

[128] *Ibid*., p. 255.

[129] *Ibid*., pp. 334-36.

[130] See especially Shailer Mathews, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), pp. 57-136. Norman Perrin, in his brief critique of Mathews' view of the Kingdom of God, does not seem to be aware of Mathews' early recognition of the eschatological element in Jesus' teaching: Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 47-48.

to define the kingdom of God in Jesus' thought as ". . . an ideal (though progressively approximated) social order in which the relation of men to God is that of sons, and (therefore) to each other, that of brothers."[131] Cadbury has shown how Mathews' treatment of Jesus' social teaching was thoroughly modernized.[132] Mathews was too good a historian, however, to ignore the apocalyptic milieu in which Jesus lived. By 1905, his view of Jesus' teaching had perceptibly shifted.[133] Then, he decisively defended the authenticity of the eschatological element in the teachings of Jesus:

> On the one hand it is claimed that the apocalyptic element is due to reading back apostolic hopes into the gospel record of the sayings of Jesus. The social and religious, rather than the eschatological, elements are therefore treated, not only as an exegetical point of departure, but also as a critical and exegetical norm. In general, such criticism is under the direction of dogmatic presuppositions as regards the kingdom of God, due to the influence of Ritschl.[134]

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[131] Shailer Mathews, The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 54. Mathews is here a typical exponent of a commonly held view. Very similar in viewpoint was Francis G. Peabody, Jesus Christ and the Social Question (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), p. 286.

[132] Henry J. Cadbury, The Peril of Modernizing Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), pp. 91-93.

[133] Shailer Mathews, The Messianic Hope in the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), esp. pp. 67-84.

[134] Mathews, op. cit., p. 74. Mathews was influenced by Johannes Weiss, whose Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes had appeared in 1892.

Mathews ultimately conceded that Jesus had no social program,[135] and he solved his personal dilemma by distinguishing between ". . . truth and the form of truth; between the substance of teaching and the form which that teaching took in a given age."[136] He saw messianism as a transitory thought-form of religious truth.

Nathaniel Schmidt, who was born in Sweden, took his M.A. degree at Madison (now Colgate) University in 1887.[137] After being dismissed from Colgate in 1896 during the heresy trial era of higher criticism, he became Professor of Semitic Languages and Literature at Cornell. In a period when American Old Testament study was extremely vigorous,[138] he attacked New Testament problems with strong credentials in Semitic backgrounds, an ability shared by such scholars as Briggs, Bacon, G. F. Moore, and C. C. Torrey. Schmidt applied his expert knowledge of Aramaic to the question of the Son of Man title. He was the first American critic to deny that it was a Christological title.[139] Schmidt essentially held that the original Aramaic term בר נשא was used by Jesus to mean "man" as a generic designation. His followers later read Messianic significance into the term. Schmidt's contention that the term did not involve Messianic claims set him at odds with the conclusions of R. H. Charles, another Semitic expert.[140] Both assumed that Jesus actually used the term, but since they took opposing views concerning its Messianic character, linguistic arguments were not entirely decisive. In view of Schmidt's liberal estimate of Jesus, it appears that theological predilections were involved in his conclusion. This is suggested by his analysis of Jesus' self-consciousness:

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[135] Shailer Mathews, _Jesus on Social Institutions_ (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928). Cf. Snell, _op. cit._, p. 538.

[136] Shailer Mathews, _Messianic Hope in the New Testament_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), p. 126.

[137] _Who Was Who in America: A Companion Volume to Who's Who in America_ (Chicago: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1942), I, 1088-89.

[138] Cf. _ante_, pp. 55f.

> With him the great question has been what his life should be, what he ought to do for his fellow-man; and his answer, that man is a child of God and should love, and trust, and deal in sincerity with, his Father and his brothers. . . . He has recognized that the world's great need is manhood, and his own supreme desire has been to be a true man.[141]

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[139] See Nathaniel Schmidt, "Was בר נשא a Messianic Title?" JBL, XV (1896), 52.

[140] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[141] *Ibid*., p. 50. B. W. Bacon seems to mistake the whole thrust of Schmidt's view, for he places Schmidt, Wrede, and Schweitzer in the "eschatological" school. Schmidt and Wrede, however, emphatically deny that Jesus was significantly eschatological. See B. W. Bacon, *Jesus the Son of God* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 24-25.

Schmidt stood self-consciously with such men as Meyer, Lietzmann, and Wrede in their attempt to minimize the eschatological element of Jesus' thought,[142] and apparently this concern influenced his denial of an eschatological reference in the term Son of Man. Schmidt seemed to be unaware of the subjective nature of this judgment, for he attributed it to the dictates of linguistic evidence:

> But for a positive knowledge of the life of Jesus no line of investigation has been more fruitful than that which, based on sound philology, has demonstrated that Jesus cannot have called himself "the Son of Man."[143]

Schmidt's Colani-like distaste for apocalyptic finds clear expression in his definition of the Kingdom of God as ". . . a new social order . . ."[144] existing ". . . as an inner reality, in their lives."[145] This view was confirmed by those sayings of Jesus that ". . . prove their genuineness most convincingly by being in contrast with this prevailing apocalyptic mood."[146] Schmidt's example demonstrates how basically the cogency of the "pillar-passage" type of argument depends upon subjective postulates. It becomes a distorting historiographical tool in direct ratio to the critic's obliviousness to its presence.

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[142] He refers to his stance with these men in The Prophet of Nazareth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 30. See also his classical liberal animus against cultic elements in Judaism in his article, "The Character of Christ's Last Meal," JBL, XI (1892), 12-17. Cf. McCown, op. cit., p. 245.

[143] Nathaniel Schmidt, The Prophet of Nazareth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 134.

[144] Ibid., p. 309. [145] Ibid. [146] Ibid., p. 308.

## IV. CONSERVATIVE INERTIA AND REACTION

No single adjective can describe the entire range of negative response to the application of historico-critical methods to the study of Jesus' life. Inertia and reaction are perhaps the most appropriate terms. The inert were those whose response was chiefly determined by the flywheel of tradition; they were critically phlegmatic. The reactionary group, on the other hand, saw a threatening element in historical criticism and reacted against it in varying degrees. They saw all too well the relativization of biblical authority implied by the methods of historical criticism. They refused to relinquish their present certainty for what Lippmann was later to describe as the pangs of freedom that accompanied the loss of religious authority.[147]

But interestingly, the conservative forces were not unaffected by the historical revolution of the nineteenth century. They tended, in fact, to magnify the historical actuality of Jesus. Borrowing a leaf from the critics, they often sought to prove their opinions concerning Jesus at the candid bar of history.

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[147] Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals (The Modern Readers' Series. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 7.

## Conservative Inertia

The majority of the lives of Jesus produced in America between 1865 and 1900 were not seriously troubled by the claims of historical criticism. Schaff, for example, though he formed an important bridge for the transfer of German criticism to America,[148] retained a basic conservatism concerning the full historical credibility of the Gospels. Schaff was a native of Switzerland and had been trained in German universities,[149] but he countered the heterodoxy[150] of the German critics in his writings. In his article on Jesus in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, he attempted to isolate the central time notices of the Gospels and to arrange the historical events of Jesus' ministry in relation to them.[151] He clearly views the Gospels as historical records which have only to be properly harmonized.[152] This approach represents a dominant tendency of American lives during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The earlier harmonies of Stuart and Robinson[153] were followed by a flood of similar works which lasted on into the twentieth century.

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[148] Cf. ante, pp. 61f.

[149] The editor's introduction to Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. vii-xxxv, gives valuable biography. Schaff taught and worked in America from 1844 until 1893, mediating a mild form of biblical criticism in a context of theological orthodoxy.

[150] Ibid., pp. xxvii-xxxi.

[151] Philip Schaff, "Jesus Christ," WSDB, II, 1358.

The lives of Jesus by Abbott,[154] Beecher,[155] and Broadus[156] are so intentionally devotional in nature that analysis of their historiography would be specious. They assumed the general historical authenticity of the Gospels, proceeding then to edifying concerns. It seems strange to place such liberal thinkers as Abbott and Beecher in this group. Yet it was Christology,[157] not criticism, in which they were liberal. Abbott accepted higher criticism in principle,[158] but it did not substantially alter his traditional approach to the life of Jesus. Although these lives are but a small fragment of those written in the period surveyed, they are typical of the majority of American lives of that era: the Gospels were treated as frankly historical sources.

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[152] Cf. _ibid_., p. 1350.

[153] Cf. _ante_, pp. 18-23.

[154] Lyman Abbott, _Jesus of Nazareth: His Life and Teachings_ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869).

[155] Henry W. Beecher, _The Life of Jesus the Christ_ (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1871).

[156] John A. Broadus, _Jesus of Nazareth_ (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1890). Broadus was an able textual critic, an eminent linguist, and a commentator of wise judgment. His writing was not limited to such popular treatments as this life of Jesus. Cf. John A. Broadus, _Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew_ (Vol. I of _An American Commentary on the New Testament_, ed. A. Hovey. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881-90). In this commentary may be seen his awareness of chronological problems, as well as his fidelity to a harmonistic approach.

### Conservative Reaction

Besides the conservative inertia, there was also a more pronounced reaction. Feeling higher criticism to be a threat to Christianity itself, the reacting conservatives took the battle into the enemy's camp. Dollar has briefly described the stance of some of these proto-fundamentalists between 1875 and 1900.[159] Although ministers spear-headed the protest, it numbered Seminary professors in its ranks as well.

Howard Osgood of Rochester, for example, made his point of attack the definition of the term higher criticism itself. Like many others, he felt that its proponents assumed an air of supercilious scorn for other kinds of criticism,[160] indicating by the word "higher" a haughty claim concerning its value.[161]

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[157] See Frank H. Foster, The Modern Movement in American Theology (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1939), esp. pp. 59-104.

[158] Cf. Lyman Abbott, The Life and Literature of the Ancient Hebrews (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), pp. iii-vi.

[159] George W. Dollar, "The Early Days of American Fundamentalism," BS, CXXIII (1966), 115-23.

Another professor, Charles M. Mead of Hartford Seminary, set his face against the prevailing conclusions of historical criticism. While a student in Germany in 1865, he had been repelled by the rationalistic lives of the Continent.[162] Mead did not quarrel with the critics' right to the use of higher criticism, but rather with its slight regard for such auxiliary evidence as external testimony and Christian experience.[163] He contended that the foundation of Christian faith rested upon three kinds of deeply-driven pilings: the tradition of the Church; Christian experience; and the historical evidence of the Gospels.[164] His reaction stands out as less visceral and more cogent than most of the opponents of higher criticism.

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[160] Howard Osgood, "The History and Definition of Higher Criticism," BS, XLIX (1892), 539.

[161] This resentment is reflected in the following title: L. W. Munhall, The Highest Critics vs the Higher Critics (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1892).

[162] Charles M. Mead, "More Recent Works on the Life of Christ," BS, XXII (1865), 207-22. Cf. ante, p. 25, footnote 47.

[163] Charles M. Mead, Christ and Criticism: Thoughts concerning the Relation of Christian Faith to Biblical Criticism (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 1892), pp. iii-v.

[164] Ibid., pp. 12-20.

Professor E. F. Stroeter of Denver University, on the other hand, saw the chief value of higher criticism as furnishing

> . . . most palpable evidence of the complete and irremediable impotency of the human mind, however well trained, not only to discover any divine truth whatsoever by its own exertions, but also to apprehend revealed truth correctly. . . .[165]

But the reactionaries did not abandon historical arguments. The historical modes of thought were so effectively implanted within the ethos of the late nineteenth century that even the conservatives placed a premium upon the evidential value of historical argumentation. They differed from the higher critics primarily in the location of their historical arguments. For them, the Gospels, as eye-witness writings produced by historical motives, were guaranteed an overwhelming historical accuracy. So the conservatives, too, made their defense at the bar of history.

## V. CONCLUSION

By 1900 the Quest of the historical Jesus in America

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[165] E. F. Stroeter, "The Gospels," Anti-Higher Criticism or Testimony to the Infallibility of the Bible, L. W. Munhall, editor (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1894), p. 252. For equally intense antipathy to the claims of higher criticism, see F. D. Storey, The Higher Criticism Cross-Examined (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1905).

had embraced a more sophisticated historiography than that which had dominated the pre-critical years. It was almost universally agreed that certain historical-critical procedures must precede any recovery of the figure of Jesus. The nature of these procedures was varied. Some critics rejected the traditional conception of Jesus without carefully formulating what steps were required to recover the real Jesus. This permitted theological predilections to exercise a large degree of influence upon the delineation of the recovered Jesus. Other scholars supposed that certain sources within the Gospels formed the materials of a true history of Jesus. Still others assumed that certain elements of Jesus as portrayed by the Evangelists could be recognized as historical because of some inherent appeal. Among the higher critics were those who, accepting historical criticism's claims, felt nevertheless that the Gospels were largely reliable histories as they stand. At the turn of the century there remained a large segment of conservatives who responded negatively to the claims of biblical criticism. In all of these viewpoints, however, may be found one near-constant. Higher critic and conservative alike insisted that his principles were truly _historical_. The historical revolution was by 1900, a _fait accompli_.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE SEARCH FOR SCIENTIFIC PRECISION:
## OBJECTIVE HISTORY, 1900-1930

The previous chapter traced higher criticism's struggle for acceptance in American biblical studies. The justifying assumption that underpins such a tracing is that critical historiography, as it was formulated in the late nineteenth century, came to exert a crucial influence upon the study of Jesus during the next century in America.

In the present chapter it will be argued that the American Quest for Jesus in the first three decades of the twentieth century was characterized by an extreme concern for recovering a scientifically respectable, objectively portrayed Jesus. Not only was such a portrayal desired, it was also generally assumed to be possible. The trough of historical skepticism that followed the pounding waves of Wrede and Schweitzer was far more real on the Continent than in America. Thus, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, while the stream of liberal lives was diminishing in Germany, the American Quest was experiencing its productive crescendo.[1]

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[1] Otto A. Piper, "Das Problem des Lebens Jesu seit Schweitzer," Verbum Dei Manet Aeternum, Werner Foerster, editor (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1953), p. 73.

Because of the sheer volume of lives produced in the period under study, it will be impossible to treat all of them. Fortunately, most are of a popular or semi-popular nature,[2] not intending to treat the subject in a rigorously critical way. It will be possible to select a restricted number of authors to illustrate general tendencies, reveal the thrust of current critical positions, and mark new departures within the Quest. Thus, the plan of the chapter is to describe dominant historiographical stances,[3] illustrating each by reference to the life of Jesus literature.

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[2] Ibid. The footnotes of Piper's essay list a large number of the more popular lives produced in America. In an article of 1931 that sketched the main lines of American New Testament study for German readers, A. C. Purdy declared that almost none of the numerous American lives attempted a thoroughly critical treatment of the sources: Alexander C. Purdy, "Das Neue Testament in der amerikanischen Theologie," Theologische Rundschau, n. F. III (1931), 384. An example of a popular life is Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows: A Rediscovery of the Real Jesus (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Publishers, 1924). Representative of a semi-critical life is William O. Carver, The Self-Interpretation of Jesus (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926).

[3] The danger of distortion is so pronounced in a survey such as this that it is necessary to qualify the description of historiography in this chapter by several observations. First, the description of dominant historiographical motifs obviously does not preclude variations or even antithetical motifs so long as they are actually outside the mainstream of historiographical presuppositions. Further, a caricature of the literature of the period will result apart from the awareness that the broad lines which the chapter traces are nuanced by various minor countertrends. An attempt will be made to report such divergences in connection with their appropriate relationships.

# I. THE IDEAL OF SCIENTIFIC HISTORY

The present section will explore the attempt of the American Quest to achieve scientific status. First, the motivation behind this attempt will be examined. Next, the dominant expressions of the scientific ideal within the Quest will be portrayed.

## The Search for Academic Acceptance

A highly instructive parallel exists between professional historians and biblical critics in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Both groups felt the threat of disenfranchisement from academic respectability because of the dissimilarity of their disciplines to those intimately related to the natural sciences. The immense achievements of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century had inflated the image of the empirical approach to such a degree that the historians sought to establish an analogous "science of history."[4] Hence, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, critical historiography in America was attempting to accommodate its method to the scientific ideal. The American historians eagerly appropriated the Rankean view of history, but, in failing to discern his kinship with German idealistic philosophy, exaggerated the rigid factualism in his approach.[5] This selective assimilation of Ranke's thought was accompanied by a steadfast refusal to veer off the path of "scientific," down-to-earth historical facts. Absent from American historical study was any sustained effort to explore such philosophical questions as the nature of historical knowledge.[6] Even the handbooks on method produced in America dispensed with the theoretical sections of the European manuals. As late as 1936, when the orthodoxy of scientific history in America was first being challenged, Charles A. Beard and Alfred Vagts could describe the normative stance of American historians as follows: "American historians have no philosophy of history; they want none; they distrust it; they regard anyone who bothers with it as an intruder or a mystic who is trying to impose something on them."[7]

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[4] On the historians' drive to establish the scientific credentials of historical study, see W. Stull Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America," JHI, I (1940), 352-56; John H. Randall, Jr., and George Haines, IV, "Controlling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians," *Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report to the Committee on Historiography* (Bulletin 54. New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), pp. 24f.; and John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, *History* (in *Humanistic Scholarship in America*, ed. Richard Schlatter. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1965), pp. 106-10.

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[5] Georg Iggers, "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," HT, II (1962-63), 17ff.

[6] Higham, Krieger, and Gilbert, op. cit., p. 99.

[7] Charles A. Beard and Alfred Vagts, "Currents of

Associated with this animus against a philosophy of history was the ideal of objectivity. A non-partisan search for truth was the hallmark of American historiography from its critical birth under Ranke on into the first quarter of the twentieth century.[8] Objective facts were regarded as immediately knowable to the neutral investigator. While it will not be maintained that this posture of objectivity was so unwaveringly held as the critics of the school sometimes imply, there was clearly a large measure of confidence in the historian's ability to see facts in real objectivity. The assumption of objectivity held by the "scientific" historians came under sharp attack by Carl Becker and Charles Beard in the 1930's.[9] In an article of 1935, Beard exposed certain of the orthodox tenets of the American historians. Among these were the assumptions that the historian can divest himself of all personal interests which retard objectivity; that historical facts can be grasped by a purely

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Thought in Historiography," AHR, XLII (1936-37), 465. The author heard a strikingly similar conviction stated during an interview with the head of the department of history in a large American university, and this in 1967.

[8] Theodore C. Smith, "The Writing of American History in America, from 1884 to 1934," AHR, XL (1934-35), 448.

[9] For discussion of this challenge, see Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (second revised edition; New York: Dover Publications, Incorporated, 1962), pp. 266-75.

rational process; and that there is an inner relationship between the facts of history that any impartial historian can ascertain.[10] These presuppositions were not carefully explicated by the American historians through carefully reasoned arguments; they were largely unexamined claims, stated as though self-evidently true, and motivated by the need to justify history as a respectable academic discipline in a science-oriented culture.[11]

American biblical critics were subject to similar pressures. A formal analogy exists between their drive to establish critical autonomy and the historians' claim to scientific status. In Western Protestantism after Kant, the intellectual ideal underwent a basic transformation.[12] The authority-oriented stance of earlier theology gave way to critical autonomy; belief was replaced by investigation. In biblical historiography this meant that those dimensions of "over-belief" stemming from faith were judged to be outside the bounds of critical inquiry. Actual events and phenomena of the "natural" order of history assumed a focal importance, for upon that kind of reality a defensible faith could be built.

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[10] Charles A. Beard, "That Noble Dream," AHR, XLI (1935-36), 76.

[11] Holt, op. cit., p. 354.

[12] Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 38-42.

The sensitivity of liberal Protestantism to the emerging world-view of post-Enlightenment culture led to an extreme valuation of the human-immanent aspects of Jesus, for it was precisely these aspects that fell within the range of manageable analysis.[13] Consequently, such matters as his personal relationship to the Father, his ethical choices, and his social outlook became the subjects of historical recovery. Since historical investigation could not pronounce judgment upon his ontological ultimacy, the intense concern of the liberal Quest shifted to his life--the actual facts of it, stripped of later Christological baggage. Hence, the search for the real Jesus was basically directed by apologetic motives.

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[13] Holtzmann saw the task of the historical critic as that of recovering the true, natural features of Jesus' person as distinguished from the religious beliefs which had gathered around him. Harnack sought to describe the original Jesus by penetrating the thick mists of dogma which had obscured him from view: Heinz Zahrnt, The Historical Jesus, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 60f. Hermann distinguished between Jesus (the basis for faith) and Christ (the content of faith) in an effort to separate the minimal objective basis for faith (Jesus' self-consciousness) from the subjective "value" which the believer infers from it: Carl E. Braaten, "Introduction," in Martin Kähler, The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ, translated and edited with an introduction by Carl E. Braaten (Seminar Editions, general editor Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 14f.

While these forces were at work in all of Western Christendom, they displayed a special vigor in America. The prestige of the natural sciences had been effectively enhanced by American Christianity's unfortunate controversy over evolution.[14] The battle had been disastrous for traditional Christianity and apologists quickly regrouped, made overtures of peace, and superficially accommodated Christianity to evolutionary thought. A most important factor in American theology's accommodation to the scientific Zeitgeist is the recognition of two distinct levels of accord. There was an earlier, rather superficial, adaptation by which the "spirit" of the biblical faith could be retained while the "letter" was dropped. By this means, the liberal credo of divine immanence, for example, could ostensibly be held with the blessings of science.[15] A later, more thorough commitment to a naturalistic world view led to a sharper declension from traditional belief. This second phase gathered particular force at the University of Chicago.

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[14] See James W. Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," The Shaping of American Religion, James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 402-42.

[15] Stow Persons, "Religion and Modernity, 1865-1914," The Shaping of American Religion, James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 391. Lyman Abbott and George A. Gordon were apologists of this sort.

The empirical strain that American theology inherited from Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, and William James was radicalized in the early twentieth century under the duress of a growing scientific outlook. Shailer Mathews, D. C. Macintosh, and Henry N. Wieman sought to provide theology with an empirical method able to operate efficiently in a scientific milieu.[16]

The appeal of empirical method was also felt in biblical studies, and more specifically, in the search for the historical Jesus. Given the orthodox positivistic epistemology, the biographer of Jesus was forced to validate his own claims to truth by appeal to an empirical method. This appeal was at times accompanied by a rigorous attempt to submit to a positivistic outlook.[17] More often the researcher's appeal to empirical assessment was made without explaining the implications to faith of such a view and without actually relinquishing numerous value judgments that could by no means be empirically tested.[18] Thus, this latter kind of critic could offer a portrait of Jesus fully commensurate with Christian faith while insisting that it was the result of scientific research. The need for critical autonomy, unimpeded by theological presuppositions, was mistakenly believed to have been realized.

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[16] Daniel Day Williams, "Tradition and Experience in American Theology," *The Shaping of American Religion*, James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of *Religion in American Life*, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 447-61. Cf. Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 14f. The Realist movement in American theology, spearheaded by D. C. Macintosh, may be seen as a campaign to establish an objective, empirical basis for validating Christian faith. This aim is manifest in Macintosh's clear-cut claim:
"I will not mince words in this connection. . . . If in proclaiming the Christian gospel we can predict and promise that whosoever will fulfill the prescribed conditions of repentance and faith . . . will experience ethico-religious salvation, then it cannot be denied that there is in the Christian message a nucleus of essentially or potentially scientific generalization." ("Empirical Theology and Some of Its Misunderstanders," *Review of Religion*, III [1939], 398).

The American Quest sought to realize the scientific ideal by incorporating into its historiography the stance of presuppositionless neutrality and by insisting upon the strictly empirical character of its method. To these two ideals we shall now turn.

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[17] This group would generally fall under Cauthen's classification of modernistic liberalism. See Cauthen, *op. cit.*, pp. 29f. The last section of this chapter will examine the method of one such approach--that of the socio-historical school.

[18] Amos Wilder maintains that a deeply evangelical kind of liberalism has prevented the radical secularization of Christian faith in America in his essay, "Biblical Hermeneutic and American Scholarship," *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954* (2. berichtigte Auflage; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), p. 27. This writer believes Wilder to have underestimated the presence of the modernistic strain within American liberalism. However, it must be freely recognized that biblical criticism in America was never characterized by the radical tendencies associated with Continental study.

## The Dichotomy between History and Theology

In their efforts to achieve critical neutrality, the American Questers attempted the systematic suppression of theological presuppositions. Hence, there arose a sharp dichotomy between historical methodology and theological belief. Within the American Quest between 1900 and 1930, this isolation of the historical personage Jesus from the Christ of confession was formulated as a necessary methodological step.[19] Thus, B. W. Bacon, in a programmatic essay, saw the task of the biographer of Jesus as that of disentangling the web of pious legend from the earliest Petrine tradition.[20] Similarly, George H. Gilbert, in a study of the history of interpretation, described the Gospel critic's work in terms of a source analysis which pierced through the early interpretative accounts back to the "initial facts."[21]

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[19] It was this division that the conservative B. B. Warfield of Princeton felt compelled to oppose. See B. B. Warfield, "The 'Two Natures' and Recent Christological Speculation. II, The New Testament Jesus the Only Real Jesus," AJT, XV (1911), 546-68.

[20] B. W. Bacon, "Ultimate Questions of Biblical Science," JBL, XXII (1903), 13.

[21] George H. Gilbert, Interpretation of the Bible: A Short History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), p. 282.

Frank C. Porter's delineation of the relationship between fact and faith indicated that religious presuppositions must be suppressed so as to allow the facts, as they actually were, to emerge.[22]

In the actual studies of Jesus' life this concern for the pure historical facts was unmistakably present. B. W. Bacon worked out a truly ambitious approach to recovering the real Jesus of history.[23] He was acutely aware of Tendenzen in the Gospels,[24] and was easily America's greatest source critic. By tracing the Gospel to its earliest sources, he believed that the historian could discover approximately what Jesus really did and said.[25] Thus, he saw potentially within the Gospels "a critically reliable history."[26]

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[22] Frank C. Porter, "The Bearing of Historical Studies on the Religious Use of the Bible," HTR, II (1909), 253-76.

[23] Bacon, op. cit., pp. 1-14. Note the specific attempt to state the problem in its breadth in Bacon's The Story of Jesus and the Beginning of the Church: A Valuation of the Synoptic Record for History and for Religion (London: George Allen and Unwin, Limited, 1928) [hereafter cited as The Story of Jesus].

[24] He is cited by an eminent form critic as a harbinger of form critical conclusions. See B. S. Easton, "A Primitive Tradition in Mark," Studies in Early Christianity, Shirley Jackson Case, editor (New York: The Century Company, 1928) [hereafter cited as Studies in Early Christianity], p. 85.

[25] Bacon, The Story of Jesus, pp. 60-278. Typical of Bacon's results are the denial of apocalyptic in Jesus' message and the inner-spiritual, gradually-growing-in-the-world view of the Kingdom of God.

E. D. Burton, like Bacon an outstanding source critic, also sought to recover the real Jesus by a process of source criticism:

> This fact [that older sources underlie the Gospels] makes it possible, in some cases, to approach a step nearer the mind of Jesus than the Gospels as they stand carry us, and suggests that by a comparison of the sources we may come very close at least to his exact thought.[27]

H. B. Sharman adopted Burton's unique view of sources[28] in his work on Jesus' teaching,[29] and suggested that by comparing the sources carefully the critic is enabled to reach "the more original form of the reputed teaching of Jesus."[30]

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[26] Ibid., p. 170. Similar to Bacon in valuing Mark as a near-historical framework are Edward I. Bosworth, The Life and Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924); George A. Barton, Jesus of Nazareth: A Biography (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922); Andrew Sledd, Saint Mark's Life of Jesus (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1927); and Lucius Hopkins Miller, Our Knowledge of Christ: An Historical Approach (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914).

[27] Ernest D. Burton, A Source Book for the Study of the Teaching of Jesus in Its Historical Relationships (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1923), p. 3. Upon an attempt to recover the historical Jesus by source criticism rests his earlier book, Ernest D. Burton and Shailer Mathews, Constructive Studies in the Life of Christ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1901).

[28] Burton's view was built upon the isolation of five major sources. His views are believed by Heber C. Snell to have been undeservedly neglected: Heber C. Snell, "American Research on Jesus," RM, I (1941), 541.

[29] Chiefly, Henry B. Sharman, Jesus As Teacher (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), and Son of Man and Kingdom of God: A Critical Study (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1943).

E. F. Scott shared the historiographical concern of recovering the unbiased historical reality of Jesus: " I have tried in this book to approach the subject with an open mind, and with the one aim of discovering, on the ground of critical and historical study, what Jesus actually taught."[31] William P. DuBose saw the possibility of reaching "the primitive gospel of pure record" by eliminating the Fourth Gospel, the birth and infancy narratives, and other later representations.[32]

Although B. S. Easton pressed form criticism into the service of a much less radical criticism than was being promoted in Germany,[33] he was careful to affirm allegiance to a theologically neutral criticism:

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[30] Ibid., p. 5. Sharman is persistently vague about precisely what criteria are to be employed in this comparison.

[31] E. F. Scott, The Ethical Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), p. v. Rendering this aim as unfulfilled is his typically liberal estimate of Jesus' eschatological teaching.

[32] William P. DuBose, The Gospel in the Gospels (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1914), p. 15.

[33] See B. S. Easton, Christ in the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), pp. 38-41, for examples of basically conservative criticism.

> . . . the study of the Gospels is an historical task, and as such must be based on historical considerations alone. We may be confident that our use of the results of historical research may be endlessly fruitful for apologetic purposes, but to mingle apologetic motives with historical in the research is to destroy both apologetics and history.[34]

There were, of course, wide divergences of opinion among individual scholars as to the bulk of recoverable history about Jesus. G. Stanley Hall, for example, was accused by Bacon[35] of attempting to psychoanalyze Jesus before psychoanalyzing the Evangelists,[36] as though the entire record was historical fact. Critics such as Bacon, Easton, and Scott were quite aware that they must go "beneath" the records to discover their factual core.

It would certainly be amiss to suggest that the majority of serious American critics were not interested in the ultimate religious significance of Jesus.[37] Few of the lives of Jesus which purport to treat strictly historical matters made a stringent attempt to forego theological evaluations. Indeed, Bacon was acutely aware of the limitations of a factual approach that failed to pursue the inner meaning of the events:[38]

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[34] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[35] B. W. Bacon, *Jesus the Son of God* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 26f.

[36] Hall devoted 733 pages to this extremely subjective task: G. Stanley Hall, *Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1917).

[37] Hugh Anderson, a transplanted Englishman, presents a needed corrective to the stereotyped image of American liberalism. It has preserved, he argues, a basic theological and evangelical concern alongside of its more non-confessional aspects. Hugh Anderson, *Jesus and Christian Origins: A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 62f. A personal judgment is

> If, on the other hand, we fail to follow Paul's example in penetrating the inner meaning of events, seeing in them an eternal redemptive purpose of God in the world, then our reconstruction of the Petrine story may be never so accurate, but who cares?[39]

Bacon's colleague at Yale, Frank C. Porter, was also aware of the stultifying tendencies of historicism. He insisted that ultimately the religious interpretations of facts are of greater worth than the facts themselves.[40] E. F. Scott could also point to the inadequacy of purely historical method. He charged that its stress on genetic relationships and religio-historical parallels threatened to

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that a stronger strain of pietism leavened the American Quest than was true of the university-oriented Quest of Germany. Relatively few formal lives in the period under survey came from the school, while many came from the church-centered ministry.

[38] See Bacon's following works: The Apostolic Message: A Historical Inquiry (New York: The Century Company, 1925); Jesus, The Son of God (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930); Jesus and Paul (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921); and The Teaching Ministry for Tomorrow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

[39] Bacon, The Story of Jesus, p. 73.

[40] Porter, op. cit., pp. 275f.

obscure "the profounder origins of religious ideas and beliefs."[41]

While recognizing the qualifying force of these remarks upon the thesis of a historical-theological bifurcation within the American Quest, it remains clear that such a methodological separation was highly valued and theoretically attempted. For Bacon's profound sensitivity to the problem must not be taken as evidence of his overcoming it. He conceived, rather, of a dual movement of interpretation. First, the life of Jesus must be carefully recovered by all of the methods of critical history.[42] Then the theologian, not the historian, must appraise the theological value of the foundation. Meanwhile, "the biographer must be content to tell the story of fact as historical criticism reveals it."[43] Porter and Scott likewise viewed theological evaluation as a secondary step which was preceded by objective-factual recovery.[44] Hence, the historical critic did not pretend to an ultimate indifference to the religious bearing of his results; he rather saw the possibility of effectively postponing personal and theological bias until a disinterested criticism had settled matters of objective factuality.

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[41] E. F. Scott, "The Limitations of the Historical Method," Studies in Early Christianity, p. 12.

[42] B. W. Bacon, Jesus, The Son of God (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), p. 10.

[43] Ibid., p. 21.

[44] See Porter, loc. cit., and Scott, op. cit., p. 16. For a strikingly similar conception of the roles of historian and theologian from the theologian's side, see G. B. Smith, "Task and Method of Systematic Theology," AJT, XIV (1910), 224-29. Here the historian is to describe the

In justifying the study of the life of Jesus as a carefully controlled discipline, the American Questers went to great lengths to specify the scientific nature of their research. While their claims to scientific status were not usually made on the basis of carefully reasoned arguments, they were registered with both frequency and zeal. The example of B. S. Easton is typical. He believed that through critical methodology he had "reached a solid foundation; we are brought face to face with the historic teaching of Jesus."[45] Concluding a moving description of Jesus in the closing part of the Hale Lectures of 1929-30, Easton could declare: "These are not rhetorical statements; they are the critically tested facts of history."[46]

The presence of apologetic motives looms perceptively behind this yearning for scientific precision among American

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growth and development of historical religious movements, while the theologian will draw from these an "efficient" theology for the present day.

[45] B. S. Easton, Christ in the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 40.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 199.

Questers. Although not all of the critics may be thus categorized,[47] it is clear that the claim to an empirical method was made to substantiate the value of Jesus' life for the modern world precisely on those critical canons acceptable to the scientific spirit.

## Historical Optimism in the American Quest

Schweitzer's account of the nineteenth century Quest for Jesus so ruthlessly exposed the subjective bondage of Jesus' biographers that his work is described as the requiem mass of a whole field of research.[48] The historical skepticism of Wrede, the theological protest of Kähler, and the emergence of dialectical theology and form criticism reinforced the abandonment of the Quest by German critics after World War I.

In America, however, between 1900 and 1930, the Quest was neither abandoned nor considered historically impossible.[49] The powerful assumptions that the critic could achieve critical objectivity and could realize a genuinely empirical method produced in the American Quest a mood of historical optimism. This mood can be demonstrated by examining three aspects of Jesus' life treated by American critics: the __curriculum vitae__ of Jesus; the teaching of Jesus; and the inner religious life of Jesus.

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[47] Notably apprehensive of any such motives were the socio-historians of the "Chicago School." This movement will be explored later in the chapter. Cf. post, pp. 125-50.

[48] Hans-Werner Bartsch, "The Historical Problem of the Life of Jesus," The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964) [hereafter cited as HJKC], p. 106.

[49] It is noteworthy that the skepticism of the American, William B. Smith, an exponent of the Christ-myth

__The curriculum vitae of Jesus__. It is fruitful to see the American Quest as in many ways a scholarly echo of the German Quest. In both countries the Quest advanced in intimate connection with the altering views of what comprised adequate sources of historical knowledge. These sources successively narrowed from the four Gospels, to the Synoptics, to the two-document source theory. In America this process of narrowing was generally belated, possibly accounting for the relatively few first-class critical lives produced by the scholar. That is to say, the acutest critics were primarily engaged in the preliminary matters of Synoptic criticism while the flood of popular and semi-critical lives were appearing. It is not surprising, then, that the very lives which attempted the most elaborate tracing of the chronology and events of Jesus' life were

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theory, was first advanced in German, not English, publications. Cf. __ante__, pp. 70f.

those least critically equipped.[50] Yet even the best American scholarship was marked by a basic confidence in the possibility of tracing the outline of Jesus' life.[51]

The teaching of Jesus. The optimistic belief in the recoverability of Jesus' teaching can be illustrated both by the facile manner in which his teachings were made to sponsor a variety of programs and by the methods which were proposed as enabling the recovery of the teaching.

Among the plethora of semi-critical treatments, Jesus' teaching was invoked as advocating the ideals of the revolutionist,[52] the mystic,[53] the pacifist,[54] and the social reformer.[55] Curiously enough, the most potent argument against historical optimism--the multiplicity of intentions attributed to Jesus' teaching--did not seem to seriously deter the confident temper. It does not appear fortuitous, furthermore, that the general mood of historical optimism was as closely associated with theological liberals as with conservative scholarship. The teaching of Jesus held a special appeal for liberal theology.[56] It is consequently difficult to determine whether historical confidence contributed to liberalism's longevity in America or whether, conversely, a theological valuation of his life and teachings demanded a historically full picture of Jesus. Probably each reinforced the other.

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[50] Besides a vast number which treat the life with no attention to the historical problems, are those such as George A. Barton, Jesus of Nazareth: A Biography (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), and William Bancroft Hill, The Life of Christ (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1917). Both of these biographers taught in well-known schools (University of Pennsylvania and Vassar College), yet both followed a Johannine chronology.

[51] The absolute chronology was, of course, judged unattainable. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that American critics recognized earlier than is generally assumed that the Gospels were not biographically motivated. Bacon was profoundly aware of the church's hand in the gospel transmission. For other remarkably frank admissions that the Gospels were not written in the interest of history, see Lucius H. Miller, Our Knowledge of Christ: A Historical Approach (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), pp. 10-19; and G. B. Smith, "The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History," AJT, XVIII (1914), 521-44.

But apart from the more naïve assumptions of historical confidence, there were formulated by the critically mature Questers a number of methodological procedures to facilitate the recovery of Jesus' teaching.

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[52] Shailer Mathews, The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909).

[53] Mary Austin, A Small Town Man (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925).

[54] Vladimir G. Simkhovitch, Toward the Understanding of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921).

[55] C. C. McCown, The Genesis of the Social Gospel: The Meaning of the Ideals of Jesus in the Light of Their Antecedents (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929).

[56] It was precisely within Jesus' teaching that Harnack located das Wesen des Christentums.

Thus, E. F. Scott believed that biblical criticism, which had "often been regarded as purely destructive, has on this point [the authenticity of Jesus' teaching] increased our confidence in the Christian tradition."[57] Scott's confidence in the knowability of Jesus' message rested upon the two-document view of sources. Mark was regarded as the primitive record of Jesus' acts, while Q was the record of mainly didactic tradition.[58] The great prestige of Q as an early source rendered the teaching trustworthy.

Henry B. Sharman, following Burton's unusual view of the sources,[59] was disposed to find document G [Q material originating in Galilee] a most trustworthy guide to Jesus' teaching about the future.[60] This judgment was based upon an intricate comparison of the numerous sources which he isolated in his analysis.[61] This exacting method, with every appearance of scientific accuracy, lent credence to his this-worldly view of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God.

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[57] E. F. Scott, The Ethical Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 9.

[58] Ibid., pp. 6-11. [59] Cf. ante, p. 111.

[60] Henry B. Sharman, The Teaching of Jesus about the Future according to the Synoptic Gospels (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1909), pp. 20-52.

[61] Henry B. Sharman, Son of Man and Kingdom of God (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1943), p. 7.

The inner religious life of Jesus. Perhaps the clearest example of the historical confidence of the American lives is the way they trod with sure steps through the area of Jesus' inner religious life. Sometimes the primary focus was upon Jesus' selfhood as it was illuminated by psychologically examining his religious experience.[62] More often the content of his self-consciousness was explored.[63] This aspect of Jesus' life was especially attractive in an era when religious experience was replacing religious dogma as the apologetic foundation of faith.[64] The personality of Jesus was given too-facile description by a large group of biographers.[65] Among critics with solid credentials there were also attempts to define the patterns of Jesus' inner life. Thus, B. W. Bacon could call the temptation narratives "the autobiography of Jesus."[66] Bacon reveals the acutely subjective basis of his apprehension of Jesus' inner life by an interpretative distinction between "prose" and "poetry."[67] Accounts such as that of the bath qol were not to be read as prose but as poetry; and the poetry expressed ". . . the inward experience of Jesus."[68] The door is thereby opened to highly personal judgments about the content of his consciousness.

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[62] E.g., G. Stanley Hall, Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1917).

[63] Geerhardus Vos, The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: the Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), is an example.

[64] Even so conservative a theologian as E. Y. Mullins grounded the apologetic appeal of his theology in religious experience. See Sidney Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," The Shaping of American Religion, James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 309ff. Cf. Bosworth, op. cit., pp. vii-viii.

Edward I. Bosworth, New Testament professor at Oberlin, declared that the unique significance of the Christian faith was "due to Jesus' profound religious experience."[69] He confidently spoke of Jesus' ". . . over-powering sense of leadership,"[70] of his dawning Messianic consciousness,[71] and of his soul ". . . aflame with the feeling of the living will of God."[72]

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[65] For a full bibliography of these highly subjective portraits, see Piper, op. cit., pp. 78-82. Between these and the more carefully critical portraits may be found perceptive studies which aim at religious edification: Horace M. DuBose, The Consciousness of Jesus (Nashville: Smith and Lamar, 1917); William O. Carver, The Self-Interpretation of Jesus (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926); and Harry E. Fosdick, The Manhood of the Master (New York: Association Press, 1916).

[66] B. W. Bacon, "The Autobiography of Jesus," AJT, II (1898), 527-60.

[67] Bacon, The Story of Jesus, pp. 129-71.

[68] Ibid., p. 94.

[69] Edward I. Bosworth, The Life and Teaching of Jesus

One other critic may serve to illustrate the psychological portrayal of Jesus' inner life. B. S. Easton, though a cautious source and form critic, described the personality of Jesus as though it were immediately knowable:

> Friendly and--within limits--sociable Jesus undoubtedly was, and he very likely had many comrades. But behind all these contacts there must have been a sense of unforgettable aloofness and--at times--unapproachableness. The warmest friendship others felt for him must always have been tempered with respect. Jesus knew himself to be *different*.[73]

Thus, the historical optimism of the American Quest was epitomized in its description of the religious experience of Jesus. And ironically, the subjective bondage of the biographer, most evident in the variety of estimates of Jesus' inner life, failed to initiate a serious questioning of the grounds for historical optimism.[74]

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*according to the First Three Gospels* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924).

[70] *Ibid*., p. 191.

[71] *Ibid*., pp. 222-33.

[72] *Ibid*., p. 151.

[73] B. S. Easton, *Christ in the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 179.

[74] As late as 1964, Roy A. Harrisville could term the psychologistic interpretation of Jesus' life as the clearest evidence of the American Quest's confidence in the historical accessibility of Jesus. See Roy A. Harrisville, "Representative American Lives of Jesus," *HJKC*, p. 191.

## II. MAGNIFIED HISTORICISM: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL METHOD

The historiographical tendencies described in this chapter came to full flower in the socio-historical school in America. The ideals of objectivity, empiricism, and optimism converged in this school and assumed their most radical expression. Thus, while the socio-historical school does not represent a strictly typical cross-section of the American Quest it nevertheless brought to a single climactic focus the controlling historiographical assumptions of American study of Jesus.

In particular, the "Chicago School" of biblical criticism was characterized by an unusual degree of fidelity to its express aim of adapting theology to the modern scientific view. B. W. Bacon (among others) might speak of the source critic as an unbiased historian, but he never completely surrendered to historicism.[75] Men like Shirley J. Case, however, committed to a quasi-naturalistic theology, came much nearer to drawing the full implications of positivistic historiography.

Again, the Chicago movement was the indigenous outgrowth of characteristic American theological tendencies.[76]

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[75] Cf. ante, pp. 113-15.

[76] Williams, op. cit., pp. 459-61.

For that reason it serves to represent the climactic expression of latent assumptions. Significantly, several interpretative studies of biblical scholarship in America find the Chicago group to be of pivotal importance.[77] For these reasons, the Chicago School merits careful attention from the investigator of historiographical assumptions in American study of Jesus.

## The Socio-Historical Approach and the "Chicago School"

If any single historical method may be said to have developed in American soil, it is the socio-historical method. That is not to say that its constituent disciplines were native to America. Sociology, Religionsgeschichte, and critical historical method originated on the opposite side of the Atlantic. Yet the welding of these approaches into a unified characteristic methodology remains the peculiar achievement of America's most indigenous school of New Testament study. This school reached its zenith in the so-called Chicago School during the period between the World Wars. Certain factors in the history of the University of Chicago shed light upon its subsequent development. Thus, we may consider them briefly.

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[77] Cf. Hugh Anderson, op. cit., pp. 61-76. It is significant that in his paper on the rise of biblical scholarship in America, read before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in 1967, Ernest C. Colwell dealt almost exclusively with the Chicago School [information based on correspondence with Colwell, January 5, 1968]. Another paper read at the same meeting singled out the Chicago experiment as the expression of American theological concerns which remain currently focal. See Robert W. Funk, "Shirley Jackson Case: Notes toward an Appreciation," pp. 14-19 [This is an unpublished paper which Funk graciously shared with the author].

The birth of the University of Chicago was so carefully and grandly designed that its rapid development into a great university is not surprising.[78] From its beginnings in 1890, it was conceived of as a bold new stroke in higher education. William Rainey Harper,[79] its first president, possessed magnetic personal qualities which, along with the generous endowment of John D. Rockefeller, enabled him to gather at Chicago creative scholars of great energy and ability. Such names as Albion Small, Shailer Mathews, Ernest DeWitt Burton, and John Dewey adorned the faculty roster at Chicago as early as 1894.[80]

The designation "Chicago School" has been used as both an epithet of scorn[81] and an appreciative title. It suggests the homogeneity of approach which characterized various departments of the University. The term is, however, rather fluid. Sometimes it is applied to the genetic social philosophy which arose at Chicago.[82] Albion Small and Thorstein Veblen contributed to social analysis from the sociological side, while John Dewey and George H. Mead provided it with a philosophy. Even within the Divinity School, the term is ambiguous. Kenneth Cauthen, for example, applies it more strictly to the theologians of Chicago.[83] In this category are figures such as G. B. Foster, Gerald Birney Smith, and E. S. Ames. In biblical studies the "Chicago School" ordinarily designates Shailer Mathews, Ernest DeWitt Burton, Shirley J. Case, Clyde Votaw, Ernest C. Colwell, J. M. Powis Smith, Edgar J. Goodspeed, Harold R. Willoughby, Donald W. Riddle, and others. At the risk of hyper-definition, within this last group there was a rather distinct bifurcation of interests. John Knox, who studied at Chicago (1927-1935), notes that Professor Goodspeed stood largely aloof from the social-historical concerns of men like Case.[84] His pursuits were more strictly literary, with a penchant for bold hypotheses, framed in the interests of discovering truth for its own sake.[85] Probably this absence of socio-historical concern may be traced back to the influence of Goodspeed's teacher, Ernest D. Burton.[86] Burton had a broad conception of New Testament study which included linguistic, source-critical, and hermeneutical tasks.[87] John Knox is to be placed within this sub-group at Chicago, though in one sense he embodies, in his career, the demise of the school.[88]

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[78] For the early history of the University of Chicago, see Thomas W. Goodspeed, _A History of the University of Chicago: The First Quarter Century_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), and _The Story of the University of Chicago, 1890-1925_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925).

[79] See _BW_, XXVII (1906), 175-265. This entire issue [March] is devoted to the memory of Harper and contains articles of biographical importance.

[80] Robert E. Mathews, "Shailer Mathews, a Biographical Note," _The Process of Religion: Essays in Honor of Dean Shailer Mathews_, Miles H. Krumbine, editor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 8.

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[81] See Shailer Mathews, New Faith for Old, an Autobiography (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), pp. 54f., for an account of the early satire directed against the Chicago experiment.

[82] See Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy (second edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 345.

[83] Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 148.

The other wing of the Chicago School bears its more typical image. In Mathews, Case, Willoughby, McCown, and Riddle the socio-historical method came to full bloom. It is this group which will be treated as representative of the socio-historical method in America.

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[84] John Knox, "A Few Memories and a Great Debt," _Cr_, V (1966), 25f.

[85] _Ibid_. Goodspeed's famous research on Ephesians is a case in point.

[86] For an account of the collaboration of Burton and Goodspeed, see James H. Cobb and Louis B. Jennings, _A Biography and Bibliography of Edgar Johnson Goodspeed_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 2f.

[87] Cf. Ernest D. Burton and Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Study of the New Testament," _A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion_, G. B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University Press, 1916), pp. 165-238.

[88] Knox's Philemon studies interlock with Goodspeed's Ephesian thesis, yet his theological concerns mark a transition away from the narrower walls of the Chicago school.

## The Thought-World of Chicago

It would be a mistake to cast the Chicago movement in the role of scholarly isolationists. They were responsive to international currents of thought. Yet they were able to operate within a remarkably cohesive thought-world, a fact which has stamped upon their labor the insignia of a school.

The Divinity School at Chicago was founded in the era of the infamous American heresy trials. Biblical criticism there was forged in the fires of theological controversy.[89] At the heart of the struggle was a central, explosive issue--religious authority. This question focused on what had been the chafing burr of Protestantism since Kant and Schleiermacher.[90] The expanding prestige of natural science in the nineteenth century was exercising an increasingly constrictive influence upon the claims of religion. After the trauma of the evolution controversy, nervous apologists conceded more and more to the claims of science, though the accomodation was quite superficial.[91] But when the full implications of the scientific world view were realistically faced a radical erosion of theological metaphysics ensued.[92] Chicago was early identified with this shift from a kind of evangelical liberalism to a quasi-naturalistic approach to religious questions.

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[89] Consult Mathews, op. cit., pp. 52-71.

[90] Carl E. Braaten, following Paul Althaus, points out that an inflationary concern with revelation arose as a result of Kant's heightening of epistemological consciousness: Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics (Vol. II of New Directions in Theology Today, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-), pp. 12f.

This metaphysical animus, with obvious parallels to the Ritschlian theology, was given extreme formulation by the pragmatic thought of Dewey which issued in instrumentalism.[93] In the shadow of Darwinism, instrumentalism maintains that ideas have meaning as functional tools in the medium of nature.[94] Their validity is therefore relative and evolving.

The growth of a form of empirical theology[95] at Chicago resulted from an allegiance to the normative model of science. Thus, theology sought to establish itself as a scientific discipline by validating its claims through an empirical assessment of religious experience.[96] Henry N. Wieman is the chief representative of this empirical strain in Chicago.

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[91] James W. Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," The Shaping of American Religion, James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 422.

[92] Ibid., p. 425-42.

[93] Schneider, op. cit., p. 455.

[94] Vergilius Ferm, "Instrumentalism," TCERK, I, 562.

[95] See Daniel D. Williams, op. cit., pp. 459-68.

The developing discipline of sociology left its mark on the Chicago movement. Albion Small of Chicago, whose influence on Shailer Mathews was profound,[97] was a pioneer in American sociology.[98] His view of sociology was deeply affected by an evolutionary view of social psychology.[99] The remarkable cross-fertilization of disciplines at Chicago, under the dominant influence of pragmatic and empirical thought, made for a radically naturalistic interpretation of Christian origins.

### The Method of the Socio-Historians

The socio-historical method in American biblical studies was firmly based on nineteenth century critical historiography. The scientific search for facts, without the intrusion of prejudice of dogma, was taken for granted. There occurred, however, around the turn of the century, a rather dramatic new impetus in American historiography. A "democratization" of history began to replace the Freemanesque conception of history as "past politics."[100] The sciences of man--biology, anthropology, psychology, economics and sociology--began to assume a larger place in the description of the past. History was conceived less in terms of military episodes and the development of institutions and more in terms of the complex needs and struggles of society. Rationalistic history was baptized at the font of Darwin and Spencer.

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[96] Ibid., pp. 170f.

[97] Robert W. Clark, "The Contribution of Shailer Mathews to the Social Movement in American Protestantism," (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1959), p. 39. Cf. Mathews, op. cit., pp. 119f.

[98] A. C. McGiffert, Jr., No Ivory Tower: The Story of the Chicago Theological Seminary (Chicago: The Chicago Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 92f.

[99] Schneider, op. cit., pp. 347-50.

Historians of early Christianity did not ignore the insights of the new history. Indeed, the whole history of religions movement on the Continent was being impelled by similar concerns. In America, the work of Shailer Mathews forms the beginning of the socio-historical approach.[101] He saw the processes of social experience as supremely important in history.[102]

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[100] Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (revised edition; New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. 373. For a lengthy treatment of the background and rise of this "new history" see Harry E. Barnes, The New History and the Social Studies (New York: The Century Company, 1925), pp. 3-39.

[101] As early as 1899 Mathews had written A History of the New Testament Times in Palestine (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), which sought to describe the social

In Shirley J. Case, a student of Mathews, the socio-historical approach was given its most thorough application to Christian origins.[103] He attempted to understand history in terms of social relationships and processes. His method was, therefore, "criticism by social environment."[104] Historical figures like Jesus were seen as profoundly related to their socio-cultural habitat. Light on the social factors of an age illuminated its leaders and movements. Given these criteria, Case formulated his methodological strategy

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environment of first century Palestine. It is significant that Frederick J. Turner, whose "frontier thesis" emphasized socio-cultural influences in American history, was, like Mathews, deeply influenced by Albion Small. Cf. Randall and Haines, op. cit., p. 46.

[102] For a succinct statement of his method see Shailer Mathews, "The Historical Study of Religion," A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion, Gerald B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), esp. pp. 26-30.

[103] The first two chapters of Case's The Evolution of Early Christianity: A Genetic Study of First-Century Christianity in Relation to Its Religious Environment (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1914) give his methodological approach. See also C. C. McCown, "Shirley Jackson Case's Contribution to the Theory of Sociohistorical Interpretation," JR, XXIX (1949), 15-29; Paul Schubert, "Shirley Jackson Case, Historian of Early Christianity: An Appraisal," JR, XXIX (1949), 30-46; and Louis B. Jennings, "Shirley Jackson Case: A Study in Methodology" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 1964), pp. 88-109.

[104] McCown, The Search, p. 198.

for recovering the life of Jesus:

> Every statement in the records is to be judged by the degree of its suitableness to the distinctive environment of Jesus, on the one hand, and to that of the framers of gospel tradition at one or another stage in the history of Christianity, on the other. When consistently applied, this test will prove our safest guide in recovering from the present gospel records dependable information regarding the life and teaching of the earthly Jesus.[105]

So the method is thoroughly genetic, being sensitive to the evolving structures of society. The dynamic nature of social ecology militates against a static view of history. Interest is thereby shifted from documents to life situations.

The similarity of the socio-historical approach to the *Sitz im Leben* concept of form criticism is striking. The American school developed its insights independently of the *formgeschichtliche Schule* and somewhat earlier.[106] The use of the method in the study of the life of Jesus is twofold. First, the evidence of the church's later social concerns within a Gospel account renders it suspect. Second, the criterion of authenticity in the Gospels is their fidelity to the social milieu of Jesus' time.

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[105] Shirley J. Case, *Jesus: A New Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927) [hereafter cited as *Jesus*], p. 115.

[106] Case points to the early work of C. W. Votaw and E. W. Parsons: Case, *Jesus*, pp. 102f.

The method of social history, however, is directly related to a constellation of evolutionary ideas in a way unlike form criticism. The biological concepts of drives, stimuli, functional adaptation, and survival loom in the immediate background of socio-history. Social environment is to persons what habitat is to organisms. History is thus explained as response to social stimuli.

### The Jesus of the Socio-Historians

It speaks well for the candor of Mathews that he permitted historical method to alter his conclusions about Jesus. Mathews' theological pilgrimage led him from an early evangelical liberalism to a modernist stance.[107] In his early career he held a liberal, non-eschatological view of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' thought.[108] In collaborating with Burton in the production of a student's life of Jesus,[109] he presented a socio-ethical interpretation of the Kingdom.[110] By 1905, however, a shift in his view in the direction of eschatology can be discerned.[111] Study of the apocalyptic milieu of Jesus' time convinced him that a false modernizing dictated the eradication of the eschatological dimension of Jesus' teaching.[112] Yet Mathews salvaged the socio-ethical thrust of the Kingdom by holding that Jesus basically enlarged and partly transformed the Jewish concept, filling it with a present ethical emphasis.[113]

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[107] Cauthen, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-53.

[108] See his definition in *The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 54.

[109] Ernest D. Burton and Shailer Mathews, *Constructive Studies in the Life of Christ* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1901).

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 121f.

Mathews gives a large place to the individuality of Jesus' consciousness. Although the revolutionary spirit of Palestine shaped his thought,[114] he directed this spirit into new channels under the impulse of an emotional crisis following baptism.[115]

It was Shirley J. Case who authored the most noteworthy critical life of Jesus ever produced in America.[116]

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[111] Shailer Mathews, The Messianic Hope in the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), pp. 67-83.

[112] Ibid., p. 74.

[113] Ibid., pp. 80-83. Cf. Ernest D. Burton and Shailer Mathews, The Life of Christ (revised edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 74.

[114] Shailer Mathews, Jesus on Social Institutions (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 11-28.

[115] Ibid., p. 32.

[116] As early as 1924, Case contemplated the procedures involved in a new life: "The Next Life of Jesus," CJRT, I (1924), 371-79. Three years later appeared his Jesus. A complete bibliography of Case's work may be found in Louis B.

Because of this, as well as his crucial bearing on the development of the socio-historical method, he will be examined rather fully. Case saw the task of the biographer of Jesus as that of devising a way to penetrate the Gospel narratives in order to ". . . rediscover the real Jesus of Palestine as he lived and labored among his immediate associates."[117] Case had little confidence in source or form criticism alone as a means of determining the authenticity of the Gospel reports about Jesus. He saw both the documents and Jesus as socially conditioned. The historian who would see the real Jesus must discount a Gospel narrative which "is peculiarly apposite to a situation realized first in the social experience of the disciples after Jesus' death. . . ."[118] On the positive side, Gospel traditions which dovetail into Jesus' normal Palestinian environment need not be called into question.[119]

Case was aware of the difficulties of distinguishing between Jesus' milieu and the primitive Palestinian church's since environmental conditions were virtually identical for each. Happily, this difficulty he believed to be offset by

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Jennings, *A Bibliography and Biography of Shirley Jackson Case* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[117] Case, *Jesus*, p. 36.

[118] *Ibid*., p. 109.

[119] *Ibid*., p. 111.

a general historical fidelity in the earliest transmission of the story of Jesus. The events were so recent as to be vividly remembered and the similarity of social environment served to checkmate the kind of distortion which would arise in a different setting.[120]

Predictably, the resultant portrait (Case admitted that a biography could not be written) was of a thoroughly Jewish prophet. The apocalyptic element was present in his teaching, but was subordinated to an ethical concern.[121] Jesus neither performed miracles nor made Messianic claims. He was a pious Jew, dedicated completely to the will of God, who called men to personal righteousness.

No member of the Chicago School attempted to establish the claims of socio-history with more gusto than Donald W. Riddle. A pupil of Case, and, later, of Dibelius, Riddle focused his labors upon the environmental factors influencing the production of the Gospels.[122] He did not write a life of Jesus, although his Gospel research laid a foundation for his treatment of aspects of the life of

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[120] _Ibid_., p. 112.

[121] _Ibid_., pp. 419-29.

[122] Note particularly his _The Gospels: Their Origin and Growth_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939); _Early Christian Life As Reflected in Its Literature_ (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936); and "The Influence of Environment on the Growing Gospel Tradition," _JR_, XXI (1941), 135-46.

Jesus.[123]

Riddle formulated Case's methodology in the language of the laboratory: "Agreement with known environment is the criterion by which a datum is identified as authentic, that is, having actually come from Jesus or as having been produced by a Christian community.[124] By this principle he felt equipped to discern the historical Jesus of Palestine. Obviously, the resultant Jesus was Jewish through and through.[125] The precise character of this Jewishness was rendered problematic by the diversity within Judaism, though Riddle favored Jesus' connection with Pharisaism.[126] On the basis of the ameliorative studies of Pharisaism by Herford, Montefiore, and Moore, Riddle denied that there was friction between Jesus and the religious leaders.[127] Indeed, Jesus lived in thorough consonance with his environment. Like the normal Jews--and unlike his ardently apocalyptic followers--Jesus gave eschatology ". . . a far more subordinate place than some of the early sources and many modern biographies suggest."[128] This sketch by no means exhausts Riddle's treatment of the historical Jesus. It serves to illustrate, however, the typical direction of socio-historical application. This treatment of three representatives of the Chicago School may serve to point out the historiographical tendencies of the movement.

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[123] Figuring in this category of study are the following: Jesus and the Pharisees: A Study in Christian Tradition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928); The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931); "The Bearing of Recent Gospel Research upon the Study of the Teaching of Jesus," JR, XIV (1934), 150-67; and "Jesus in Modern Research," JR, XVII (1937) [hereafter cited as "Jesus"], 170-82.

[124] Donald W. Riddle, The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 210.

[125] Riddle, "Jesus," pp. 171-76. [126] Ibid., p. 175.

[127] Donald W. Riddle, Jesus and the Pharisees: A Study in Christian Tradition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 169-77. This study treats primarily the tradition-forming forces within the early church. The ten-

## Critique of the Socio-Historians

The reaction against a purely literary criticism of the Gospels remains a positive contribution of the socio-historians at Chicago. Investigation of the cultural influences which affected the Church's traditions about Jesus has now become normative. It is noteworthy that American criticism developed this insight in a quite indigenous way. The relevance of social and cultural factors to Jesus' life and teachings was quickly recognized by American critics outside the Chicago School. F. C. Grant,[129] and more recently,

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sion between church and synagogue in Rome issued in the conflict stories of Mark. Paul had earlier laid the groundwork for this anti-Pharisaic polemic. Cf. pp. 8-13, 67-91.

[128] Riddle, "Jesus," p. 173.

[129] F. C. Grant, The Economic Background of the Gospels (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).

S. V. McCasland,[130] are cases in point.

Indeed, certain insights of the socio-historians, appropriated and stubbornly maintained by a phalanx of American scholars, have played a divisive role in American-European theological scholarship.[131] Amos Wilder has been a vox clamanti for the recognition of the profound cultural conditioning of the biblical revelation.[132] Yet Wilder represents a position clearly in advance of the "Chicago School"; the disillusionment with historicism has had its telling effect upon him.[133]

Recognizing the permanent contributions of the "Chicago School," an examination of its historiographical presuppositions is in order.

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[130] S. V. McCasland, By the Finger of God: Demon Possession and Exorcism in Early Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951).

[131] See above all, Amos N. Wilder, "Biblical Hermeneutic and American Scholarship," Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954 (2. berichtigte Auflage; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), pp. 24-32.

[132] Wilder maintains that existentialist hermeneutics irons out the wrinkles of historical individuality, reducing men to abstract ciphers. Cf. his "New Testament Hermeneutics Today," Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper, William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, editors (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 48-51, and "Social Factors in Early Christian Eschatology," Early Christian Origins, Allen Wikgren, editor (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), pp. 67-76.

[133] Amos N. Wilder, "New Testament Theology in Transition," The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, Harold R. Willoughby, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), esp. pp. 427-32.

Separation between fact and interpretation. The entire group of the socio-historians could have agreed with the essential description of the interpretative task as laid down by Burton in 1898.[134] He held that the biblical interpreter's task was to discover the content of the biblical literature, determine its chronological order, then turn it over to the systematic theologian who could then formulate the truths of revelation. This dichotomy between fact and interpretation underlies the work of Case in a rather extreme form. He believed that the historian must make the attempt to divest himself, *qua* historian, of all interpretative bias. Thus, the lure of Christology was seen as a distorting principle, tending ". . . to discourage any strictly empirical approach to the personal religion of Jesus viewed in terms of his human career in its Palestinian setting."[135] Case intimated again and again that Jesus could be evaluated in ". . . the white light of a disinterested historical research."[136] Riddle was equally insistent upon divorcing theological assessment of Jesus from an objective, historical description. He eulogized Case's superior measure of objectivity, which unlike Bultmann's treatment of Jesus, did not raise the intrusive question of Jesus' meaning.[137] Even his teacher, Dibelius, was censured for trespassing beyond the historian's bounds into theological domains.[138] McCown summed up the desired attitude in his definition of honest interpretation which demanded ". . . an unwearied and inflexible determination, not to win an argument or defend a creed, but to discover the truth."[139]

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[134] Ernest D. Burton, "The Function of Interpretation in Relation to Theology," *AJT*, II (1898), 52-79.

[135] Shirley J. Case, "The Lure of Christology," *JR*, XXV (1945), 166. The thesis of Case's *Jesus through the Centuries* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932) is that each generation portrays Jesus in a functionally satisfying way.

In evaluating this assumption, it should first be noted that apart from some such stance the world would still be inhabited by centaurs and unicorns. It stands as a monument to the orthodox critical historiography of the nineteenth century that today the hermeneutical procedure of an Osiander, say, is quite impossible. No group celebrated this dispassionate search for truth at all costs more than the "Chicago School." What Harvey has described as "a Promethean will-to-truth"[140] impelled the historical revolution which remains a living force in all modern thinking. The very mind-set of twentieth century men is permeated by the influence of this intellectual transformation.

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[136] Riddle, "Jesus," p. 178.

[137] Shirley J. Case, "The Life of Jesus," _Religious Thought in the Last Quarter-Century_, G. B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 41.

[138] Donald W. Riddle, "The Bearing of Recent Gospel Research upon the Study of the Teaching of Jesus," _JR_, XIV (1934), 153, 164.

[139] C. C. McCown, "Honest Interpretation," _RM_, I (1941), 314.

But the inadequacy of objective historiography is, by now, generally admitted. Prometheus, for all his achievement, was ultimately bound. The historical Jesus, portrayed by a positivistic historiography, leaves the really significant dimension of Jesus--his identity with the Christ of faith--explained by inefficient causes. Within the larger Chicago School, this recoil from Christology may be seen as the correlate of a dynamic, evolutionary thought world. Mathews, Case, Riddle, and McCown alike, will accept no ultimate metaphysical or theological norm.[141] Each generation of Christianity may discover only its functional ultimate in Jesus.

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[140] Van A. Harvey, op. cit., p. 4.

[141] This relativism may be indicated by two quotations: "When interest in maintaining the absolute validity of beliefs yields to a recognition of their functional worth for individuals and groups, the social approach will greatly enlarge one's vision and afford many new insights into the significance of historic Christianity's intellectual quests." Found in Shirley J. Case, "Whither Historicism in Theology," The Process of Religion: Essays in Honor of Dean Shailer Mathews, Miles H. Krumbine, editor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 65. "Practically all of men's decisions have to be based upon the best they know at the time. Until a better than Jesus

Empirical history. Errett Gates, a church historian at Chicago, spelled out in 1916 three scientific axioms upon which modern history rested. The socio-historians under consideration worked entirely within these principles:

1. historical correlation (events, movements are related by causal nexi);
2. historical development (forces, institutions evolve); and
3. historical uniformity (events of past are analogous to present events).[142]

Given what Gates approvingly hailed as "the reign of natural law in history as in nature,"[143] the socio-historians simply had no possibility of admitting the miraculous. The Resurrection was thereby explained solely in terms of psychological effect. Its meaning must be found in a judgment about its functional value.

Case believed that truly scientific history demanded a relativistic outlook. He was accordingly a determined foe of absolutes. Theoretically, he held that evolving views

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appears, he is the ultimate." In McCown, The Search, pp. 300f.

[142] Errett Gates, "The Development of Modern Christianity," A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion, G. B. Smith, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), pp. 458-60.

[143] Ibid., p. 460.

are to be judged not by timeless norms, but at the bar of function. Yet Schubert has shown that Case, though coming even closer than Troeltsch to a thoroughly relativistic historicism, apparently maintained one absolute: though he was wary of the subtle temptation to assume historical objectivity, he nevertheless absolutized his grasp of the true nature of history; it was a vital, ongoing process, the essential nature of which was progress. And, as such, it was knowable through a proper historical method.[144]

Methodological flaws. Like most historical methods, socio-history suffers from an imprecision inherent in the historian's subjectivity. The socio-cultural evidence provided no indisputable key to Jesus' eschatology, for example. Riddle offers a time-honored, but questionable, explanation of the apocalyptic character of Jesus and the disciples.[145] Similarly, Case's delineation of the religion of Jesus, no less than Mathews' image of his inner life, is obtained by an eclectic reading of the sources. The inner life of a person is the least accessible aspect of human biography, especially to the necessarily stringent principles of the socio-historical method.

E. C. Colwell, intimately related to the Chicago group,[146] raises an extremely apposite criticism at this point. He maintains that "where the environment supplies the criteria of authenticity the individual is portrayed in such fuzzy outline that he blends indistinguishably into his background."[147] Thus, the unique responses and insights, constitutive of great personalities, which stand in frequent contrast to their times, must remain unintelligible. Socio-historical method, while recognizing the role of individual's response to environment,[148] cannot account for uniqueness or originality except by momentarily waiving its own principles and "psychologizing."[149]

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[144] Schubert, op. cit., 34-37.

[145] Cf. ante, pp. 140f.

This leads to a specific criticism of Riddle's description of Jesus' relationship to Judaism. He portrayed Jesus in utter harmony with official Judaism. Any polemical grit he saw as the production of a later animus. His explanation of Jesus' crucifixion thereby remains colorless and without the ring of truth.[150] There is a point where genetic development shades off into genetic fallacy.

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[146] Colwell was successively Professor of New Testament, Dean of the Divinity school, and President of the University of Chicago, in the years 1930-51.

[147] E. C. Colwell, An Approach to the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), p. 46.

[148] E.g., Case, The Evolution of Early Christianity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1914), pp. 37f.

[149] The attempt of Case to account for the rise of Christianity remains, at least for the writer, thoroughly ambiguous: it was ". . . an outburst of spiritual energy [?] on the part of Jesus and his followers striving after new and richer religious attainments under the stimuli of a new and more suggestive [?] environment." Ibid., p. 28.

Riddle's application of environmental criticism rested upon the optimistic judgment that the study of backgrounds was essentially satisfactory, and this before Qumran or Nag Hammadi.[151] Our relatively slim knowledge of primitive Christianity makes criticism by environment less carefully controlled than Riddle assumed.

It has been earlier noted that the "democratization" of history of the Chicago School can itself be environmentally explained, at least to a degree. The "new history," advocated at the turn of the century by historians such as James Harvey Robinson, Charles A. Beard, and Frederick Turner, came to the revolutionary insight that man was more than a rational creature. The effect of psychological and economic factors in history was profoundly grasped;[152] the influence of ideas in history was properly "debunked." More recently, notably in Samuel E. Morison and Perry Miller, there has been a reaction against the reaction. A firmer place has been given to intellectual history.[153] At this point it may be indicated that a telling weakness of the socio-historical method is precisely its socially deterministic flavor. It is one thing to speak of a criticism by social environment. This can subtly shift to explanation by social environment. Then, only a step remains from determination by environment. To the credit of Riddle it must be noted that a later article of his indicates a growing sensitivity to this very problem.[154] In it, he has apparently retrenched from his earlier too-mechanistic view of social influence.[155]

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[150] Donald W. Riddle, Jesus and the Pharisees: A Study in Christian Tradition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 51f.

[151] Ibid., p. vii.

[152] See Randall and Haines, op. cit., pp. 18-27.

Clearly, the value of the method lies more in its ability to discover the influences which shaped the Gospels than to recover the figure of Jesus. If this seems to accord the socio-historical method a purely negative role in any recovery of the historical Jesus, it should be remembered that positive results must be weighed by their ability to do justice to the "negative" conclusions.

## III. CONCLUSION

In the three decades between 1900 and 1930 a kind of critical orthodoxy came to dominate the American Quest. The valid sources for a life were successively telescoped from the four Gospels, to the Synoptics, to the two primary documents which underlay the Synoptic tradition. Although this period marks the high water level of the more popular, less technical research on the life of Jesus, there were relatively few lives which employed the best current criticism in a thorough-going way. The most important work was being done at the foundational level of Gospel criticism.

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[153] See Chard Powers Smith, Yankees and God (New York: Hermitage House, 1954), pp. 7f.

[154] Donald W. Riddle, "The Influence of Environment on the Growing Gospel Tradition," JR, XXI (1941), 135-46.

[155] Ibid., esp. p. 137.

A concerted effort was made by American critics to subject the Gospels to a disinterested historical criticism. The ideal of a scientific history, impervious to the distorting influences of theological interests, achieved in this period the status of a self-evident virtue. Given the possibility of a scientific history, the critics had at their disposal a formidable weapon against the remaining pockets of theological conservatism, as well as a discipline that could lay claim to academic respectability in a culture where science was a word to conjure with.

At one level, the greatest danger inherent in the scientific orthodoxy was the critics' blindness to their impelling presuppositions. Their oft-repeated claim to a dispassionate neutrality scarcely conceals the extent to which they were guided by surreptitious assumptions. Among these were the largely unexamined claims of the historian to be able to divest himself of subjective predilections; to be able to perceive historical events in their objective givenness; that all fair-minded historians would agree on the interpretation of the meaning of an event; and that historical criticism could be scientifically pursued.

At another level, the greatest danger in the American Quest was its theoretical separation of theology from history. In pursuing a narrowly conceived scientific history, it suppressed the fact that the believer cannot waive the faith claims of the Gospels without seriously threatening to truncate their Christology.

# CHAPTER V

# THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE TO OBJECTIVE HISTORY, 1930-1965

The present chapter, along with the one following, will survey trends in American historiography as they have been reflected in the study of Jesus from 1930 to 1965. This chapter will view the influence of emerging factors that constituted a theological critique of the historiography which was ascendant in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In the absence of a single event which might mark a decisive *terminus a quo* for this new departure, 1930 may serve as an approximate beginning point. It was in the late 1920's that dialectical theology was first reaching an American audience.[1] The collapse of American liberalism was proclaimed by a chorus of voices in America in the years immediately following 1930.[2] Consequently, the beginnings of a reassessment of the relation of theology to history can be placed about 1930.

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[1] In 1928 several of Barth's essays were first published in America: Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928). That same year, Brunner delivered the Swander Lectures at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church at Pittsburg. These lectures were published as *The Theology of Crisis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).

[2] Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 228. Cf. *post*, pp. 158f.

## I. THE THEOLOGICAL RENAISSANCE

### The European Background

Just as the critique of scientific history among professional American historians was inspired by Continental developments,[3] so the theological challenge to objective history in America must be traced to European origins. In the second decade of twentieth century Europe there was felt a growing malaise with the drift of historicism. Built as it was upon a liberal anthropology and an optimistic, evolutionary view of history, it became difficult to fit the grim realities of World War I into its facile meliorism.

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[3] The relativists' revolt was led by Carl Becker and Charles Beard. Their chief criticisms were leveled against the objective historian's ability to comprehend the entirety of the past, to select the absolutely significant events from a welter of data, and to perceive any given historical event from a scientific-objective stance. Such claims implied both historical omniscience and a detachment that transcended human perspectives. See John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, History (in Humanistic Scholarship in America, ed. Richard Schlatter. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1965), pp. 117-33. Becker was protesting against objective history as early as 1910, but only in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1931 was his profession ready to listen. Beard was stimulated to an even more emphatic break with the scientific orthodoxy under the tutelage of his German son-in-law, Alfred Vagts. Vagts introduced him to Karl Heussi's Die Krisis des Historismus in 1932. This may be considered America's second "historical Aufklärung," the first having resulted from the Rankean influence. Cf. ante, pp. 71-73.

Again, when the full impact of the historical-critical method was seen to threaten the very basis of traditional Christian faith, a profound questioning of the rationale of historicism ensued. Ernst Troeltsch, for example, himself a thorough historicist, wrestled vigorously with the implications of his historiography.[4] Holding that the critical-historical method was the only viable alternative to obscurantism, Troeltsch heartily embraced the principles upon which orthodox critical historiography rested. Three principles basic to such a view were: (1) the principle of criticism (historical judgments must be formulated as probabilities, always open to revision); (2) the principle of analogy (we must suppose that our own present experience is essentially similar to experience of the past); and (3) the principle of correlation (the phenomena of human life are related and interdependent so that a radical historical change cannot take place without affecting its immediate surroundings.[5] Troeltsch perceived that these principles were thoroughly inimical to traditional Christian belief.

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[4] Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966) [hereafter cited as Historian], pp. 3-5.

[5] Ibid., pp. 14f.

His last major work was an attempt to deal with precisely this dilemma.[6]

The limitations of the history of religions approach, firmly based on a historicistic foundation, became manifest in its growing theological irrelevance during the second and third decades of the twentieth century.[7] Dissatisfaction with this approach led to a dramatic resurgence of biblical theology. A renewed attempt to grasp the theological dimension of the biblical history began to crack the mold of scientific neutrality.[8]

By far the most radical break with historicism came in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth.[9] He essentially reversed the immanental concerns of liberal Protestantism and emphasized the transcendence of God. Historical science, he believed, like every other human effort, was constitutionally unable to grasp the deepest reality of Jesus Christ.[10] Thus, the critique of objective historiography may be viewed as a theological protest against the inner logic of the positivistic historical method. Such a radical limitation of the validity of historical criticism, if taken seriously, would have called into immediate question the basis of the then-vigorous American Quest. The theological challenge to objective historiography in America was delayed, however, until the 1930's, and even then it did not produce shock waves comparable to its earlier German appearance.[11] Nevertheless, as this reaction began to jar the consciousness of American liberalism, there was an increasing necessity among American students of Jesus to take a position *vis-a-vis* the conflicting claims of the older objective historiography and the newer theologically open historiography. This transfer of the theological awakening to America will now be sketched.

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[6] Ernst Troeltsch, Der Historismus und seine Probleme (Band III of Gesammelte Schriften. 4 Bände; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck],1912-25). It is significant that Troeltsch is looming anew on the theological horizon in a time when the implications of the historical-critical method for hermeneutics are being re-examined. See especially Thomas W. Ogletree, Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1965); Benjamin A. Reist, Toward a Theology of Involvement: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch (London: S C M Press, Limited, 1966); and Harvey, Historian.

[7] James D. Smart, The Interpretation of Scripture (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 261-70.

[8] Ibid., pp. 270-81.

[9] Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins: A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 22-24.

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[10] Barth's Preface to the second edition [1921] of his epoch-making commentary on the Epistle to the Romans contained a clear denial of the sovereignty of historical criticism. See *ibid*., p. 22.

[11] It is significant to note that the "crisis of historicism," which was first felt in German post-Rankean historiography, was a development to which American professional historiography was largely oblivious as late as 1936: Charles A. Beard and Alfred Vagts, "Currents of Thought in Historiography," *AHR*, XLII (1936-37), 464.

## Biblical Theology in America[12]

The collapse of liberalism in Germany followed in the wake of World War I. Among the prophetic voices of a new theology were Barth, Brunner, Gogarten, and Tillich, whose views were beginning to penetrate American liberalism in the late twenties and early thirties.[13] The European theology underwent a basic transposition, however, as it passed through the mesh of American liberalism. On the whole, it was less extravagant in its reaction to liberalism, retaining a firmer anchorage in the empirical or "realistic" American tradition.[14] In 1931 H. Richard Niebuhr contributed an essay to Wieman's symposium which basically affirmed the validity of Tillich's critique of American realism.[15] In 1932 Walter Lowrie was insisting that Americans pay attention to the theology of crisis.[16] The same year, Reinhold Niebuhr published his highly influential Moral Man and

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[12] For full bibliographical orientation, see Nelson Burr, A Critical Bibliography of Religion in America (Vol. IV, parts 3, 4, and 5 of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. L. Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 1076-96.

[13] Cf. ante, p. 153.

[14] Burr, op. cit., pp. 1087f.

[15] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century," Religious Realism, D. C. Macintosh, editor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), pp. 413-30.

[16] Walter Lowrie, Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1932).

Immoral Society, with its critique of utopian social thought. The year 1934 was little short of apocalyptic. Reinhold Niebuhr made more explicit the biblical roots of his protest against liberalism in a series of lectures later published as An Interpretation of Christian Ethics.[17] Edwin Lewis,[18] George W. Richards,[19] and Walter M. Horton[20] gave their support to the nascent evangelical concern. Walter Horton's comment is an indication of the extent to which dialectical theology had affected America by 1934: ". . . but now, under stress of suffering, the American mind is beginning to feel the force of Barthianism for the first time and to react to it with some heat."[21]

Perhaps the single integrating factor in this potpourri of protest was the consensus that American liberalism was bankrupt. There was no American leader, however, who was able to organize the plaintiffs into a unified movement.[22] The outstanding individual figures were the Niebuhr brothers and, after his immigration to America in 1933, Paul Tillich.

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[17] Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935).

[18] Edwin Lewis, A Christian Manifesto (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1934).

[19] George W. Richards, Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism: The Gospel of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934).

[20] Walter M. Horton, Realistic Theology (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1934). Despite its title, this work marked a break with the Macintosh-Wieman axis of empirical theology.

[21] Horton, op. cit., p. 36.

The various names used to designate the new theology, while coined by its critics and bordering on caricature, point fairly aptly to some of its concerns: "Neo-Orthodoxy," "Neo-Biblicism," "Neo-Supernaturalism," and "Post-Liberalism." In general, the movement took such biblical categories as revelation, sin, and incarnation with more radical seriousness than had liberalism. This initiated a broad shift of interest from philosophical theology to a more specifically biblical theology.

The effect of the theological revival upon the historical study of the Bible was pronounced. The historicist's method of dispassionate recovery of _bruta_ _facta_ from the ancient records had become increasingly irrelevant.[23] In sharp contrast to this irrelevance was the prophetic power of men like Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr whose penetrating judgments derived from a radical engagement with the biblical message. This theological resurgence began to translate itself into historical studies in America in a singular way.

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[22] A sketch of the diversity of concerns which characterized the neo-orthodox mood in America may be found in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Neo-Orthodoxy Demythologized," _CC_, LXXIV (1957), 649-51.

[23] Smart, _loc_. _cit_.

Just as the theological renewal was modified in its American assimilation, so its effect upon the historicism of American biblical critics was less pronounced than was true in Germany. For one thing, the acids of historical skepticism had not eroded the American Quest nearly so seriously as they had on the Continent. Thus, while Barth and Bultmann signalled a halt to the Jesus of history research and proclaimed the Christ of the kerygma, there remained a historical confidence in America which declined to abandon the older Quest.[24] So lives of Jesus continued, although with a difference. Some took seriously the theological critique of historicism and sought to unite historical and theological concerns. Others were only mildly shaken from the position of historicism.[25] Clearly discernible is the diversity of response to the theological challenge to objective history.

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[24] Amos N. Wilder, "Biblical Hermeneutic and American Scholarship," Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954, W. Eltester, editor (2. berichtigte Auflage; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), p. 25. That is not to say that the Quest was entirely extinguished in Germany. To the contrary, such men as Jeremias and Stauffer represent a tradition of partial continuity with the older Quest.

[25] Roy A. Harrisville, "Representative American Lives of Jesus," HJKC, p. 88. Most of Harrisville's "representatives" fall into this category.

There has been no single pattern which may serve to stereotype American study of Jesus in the years between 1930 and 1965. A spectrum model will thus be used, depicting the concurrent positions of historiography which will be designated unbroken historicism, modified historicism, and theological concern.

## II. UNBROKEN HISTORICISM

There is ample evidence to indicate a continuation of historicism in the American Quest. The fact that during the period under survey the very front rank of American New Testament scholars produced lives of Jesus largely continuous with pre-Schweitzerian research is itself significant.[26] This phenomenon is often noted[27] and is explicable only on the assumptions that historical skepticism and the critique of historicism were not regarded as potent enough to render the Quest impossible, and that liberalism remained vigorous enough to ensure a theological legitimacy for the Quest.

There remained, furthermore, an extremely tenacious allegiance to the historical-critical method which viewed with suspicion the attempt to introduce a theological dimension into the historical study of the Bible.[28] It is the longevity of this historicist trend, and its apparent strength, which has prompted the recent attempts to bring its contentions to bear upon German-American discussion.[29] It seemed to many Americans that the unhappy marriage of history and theology threatened to open up a new era of obscurantist biblicism and the only cure was a speedy divorce.[30] Thus, a sort of American "Counter Reformation" was directed against theological resurgence in order to preserve the basis of objective history.

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[26] A survey of the authors treated by Harrisville in his previously cited essay will document this statement: Harrisville, op. cit., pp. 172-96.

[27] Cf. Anderson, op. cit., p. 68; Wilder, loc. cit.; and Smart, op. cit., p. 299.

The "Chicago School"[31] commanded a formidable opposition to any relaxation of the historical-theological bifurcation. Under Shirley J. Case's editorship the Journal of Religion--the scholarly voice of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago--adhered to a policy of systematic exclusion of the theological dimension from its pages.[32] He held that the function of theological scholarship was "to provide a scientific body of tested knowledge concerning the data of religion."[33] The element of personal commitment was not to intrude into the realm of objective historical research. With so exalted a conception of theological abeyance, it is hardly surprising that he could take issue with C. C. McCown's suggestion that the biographer of Jesus recognize and formulate his own philosophical presuppositions.[34] His criticism of McCown so clearly reveals his noble dream of objectivity that it merits quotation:

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[28] Anderson, op. cit., pp. 64f.

[29] Amos N. Wilder has been the most ardent mediator of American socio-historical concerns to recent hermeneutical discussions. See Wilder, op. cit., pp. 24-32; "New Testament Hermeneutics Today," Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper, William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, editors (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 38-52; "Social Factors in Early Christian Eschatology," Early Christian Origins, Allen Wikgren, editor (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), pp. 67-76; and "The Word As Address and the Word As Meaning," The New Hermeneutic [hereafter cited as New H], James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., editors (Vol. II of New Frontiers in Theology: Discussions among Continental and American Theologians, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. 4 vols.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963-), pp. 198-218. Cf. Robert W. Funk, "The Hermeneutical Problem and Historical Criticism," New H, pp. 164-97.

[30] Robert H. Pfeiffer, "Facts and Faith in Biblical History," JBL, LXX (1951), 13.

[31] Cf. ante, pp. 125-50.

> We should have said [in contradistinction to McCown's view] that the scholar ought to know his own presuppositions and then strive by every means in his power to eliminate them from his historical investigations. To reply that this is impossible does not excuse him from making the effort as deliberately and strenuously as he can. Otherwise he will seek to recover a picture of

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[32] Bernard E. Meland, "A Time of Reckoning," JR, XXIX (1949), 2.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Shirley J. Case, A critical review of C. C. McCown's The Search for the Real Jesus: A Century of Historical Study. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940. JR, XXI (1941), 59.

> Jesus that accords best with his modern religious needs and then super-impose this interpretative reconstruction upon the real Jesus of history.[35]

Although Case directed these comments to McCown, it should not be assumed that McCown had abandoned historicism. McCown was, in fact, quite reactionary in his response to Barthianism. Like Case, he saw it as merely a flight from history in the face of the disillusionment reigning in Europe.[36] He remained convinced that any recourse to "suprahistorical" explanations of Jesus' significance--such as Dibelius was propounding--were retrogressions to biblicism.[37] Furthermore, he specifically declined to permit faith-judgments to the historian of Jesus' life: "The historian must recognize faith in the living Lord as one of the tremendous forces behind the Christian movement. Farther than that he refuses to go."[38]

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[35] Ibid., p. 59.

[36] McCown, The Search, pp. 295-98.

[37] Ibid., pp. 294f.

[38] Ibid., p. 296. McCown was by 1940 aware of the limitations of positivistic historiography and viewed the failure to find the real Jesus as a result of an inadequate philosophy of history. He chided the previous generation for its illusion of "presuppositionless" scientific methods and blind but optimistic trust in progress (The Search, p. 289). Yet for all McCown's uneasiness about the historiographical impasse, he refused to sacrifice his own extreme confidence in both the dogma of progress in history and the historian's objectivity. In an article of 1945, McCown denounced dialectical theology as a temporary European psy-

Outside the "Chicago School," an equally intense animus against the admixture of theology with history may be found. Morton Enslin, an unrepentant liberal, waged a relentless battle on behalf of purely objective research. He described the claims of biblical theology as "windy gusts from tired pseudo-liberals."[39] He feared for the future of biblical studies which were threatened by the bias of theological motives.[40] He saw the scholar's task as one of ridding his mind utterly of the notion that the biblical literature of his examination was in any respect of a different sort than any other ancient text.[41] Then it should be studied with no other purpose than to trace its elusive meaning

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chosis born of a short-sighted view of history. Its great sin was its failure to see that human society and its history are

". . . part of an ordered universe and that they move, not at random, not in endless, helpless circles, but along a definite path. Though we can but dimly plot it, we can discern the movement, and, on any reasonable hierarchy of values, we cannot fail to see that the movement is upward. This fact of movement, in other words of evolution, is the one characteristic which gives the universe and the life of man real value." In C. C. McCown, "In History or Beyond History," HTR, XXXVIII (1945), 173. Given McCown's view of the knowable process of history, immediate to the eyes of the empirical realist (The Search, p. 308), his critique of the dialectical theologian's predication of a transcendent dimension beyond the immanent historical process is thoroughly cogent.

[39] Morton Enslin, "The Future of Biblical Studies," JBL, LXV (1946), 8.

[40] Ibid., pp. 1-12.

[41] Ibid., pp. 7f.

wherever it might lead.[42]

Enslin's interest in the real historical Jesus, thoroughly distinct from the Christ of faith, guided his earliest study of Jesus. In 1929 he sought to utilize the "pillar-passage" criteria made famous by P. W. Schmiedel as a crucial methodological key to discovering "unimpeachably original data" about Jesus.[43] This task was impelled by the belief that criticism could penetrate beneath the creedal portrait of the Gospels.[44]

Upon these assumptions rested his life of Jesus--though he freely admitted that it was not a complete biography.[45] He maintained that it was possible to get a "very clear picture of the kind of man Jesus was" and to perceive his fundamental concern for, and his complete devotion to, what he believed to be God's will.[46] This quest for the "actual flesh-and-blood character" of Jesus he held to be of such infinite value that no substitution of "the Eternal

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[42] Ibid., p. 9.

[43] Morton Enslin, "An Additional Step toward the Understanding of Jesus," JR, IX (1929), 425.

[44] See Morton Enslin, "'Twixt the Dusk and the Daylight," JBL, LXXV (1956), 19-26.

[45] Morton Enslin, The Prophet from Nazareth (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961), p. 1.

[46] Ibid., p. 6.

Christ and his part in the all-central epic of salvation" could replace it.[47]

In a symposium on the New Quest in 1962, Enslin decried the New Quest's "cavalier disregard" for "the man himself, unadorned and untransformed by centuries of adoration,"[48] as both wrong and wrongheaded.[49] To him, permitting theology to trespass on historical domains spelled the danger of exchanging the really human Jesus for a puppet moving "on the silver screen of an altogether-other Cinerama _in vacuo theologico_."[50]

Enslin's invective against a theological absorption which would drain away attention from the historical Jesus was clearly motivated by a position analogous to older liberalism. Other American scholars who were otherwise basically outside the bounds of what is here described as unbroken historicism shared a similar concern for the human personality of Jesus. E. J. Goodspeed, for example, dealt in surprising detail with the inner life of Jesus. At his baptism "a curtain had rolled up in his mind and he saw with a new and surpassing clearness what God really wanted life to be and the great role God wanted him to play in the drama of redemption."[51] He fell from this "tremendous exaltation into a mood of deep depression, which he regarded as temptation."[52]

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[47] _Ibid_., p. 5.

[48] Morton Enslin, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," _JBR_, XXX (1962), 222f.

[49] _Ibid_., p. 220.

[50] Morton Enslin, _The Prophet from Nazareth_ (New York: The McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961), p. 14.

Similarly, S. Vernon McCasland, who posited Jesus as the leader and pioneer of the Christian's faith,[53] was concerned to analyze the psychological-spiritual struggles of Jesus.[54] This was possible for him because he viewed the Gospels as containing so substantial a body of the sayings of Jesus and "the decisions of his mature life" that only an interpretation of these facts was needed, which was the scholar's task.[55]

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[51] Edgar J. Goodspeed, A Life of Jesus (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 43.

[52] Ibid.

[53] S. Vernon McCasland, The Pioneer of Our Faith (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), pp. 5f.

[54] See ibid., pp. 26-36 for a good example.

[55] Ibid., p. vii. One of the strangest representatives of historicistic biographers of Jesus was A. T. Olmstead, Professor of Oriental History at the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1945. Olmstead revealed an ambiguity uncharacteristic of most historicists in his treatment of the miraculous, yet he advocated an ambitious attempt to see Jesus through the processes of historical method. He asked in his Preface, ". . . can the historian report in all honesty that he has met the great Prophet face to face under the blazing light of history?" Then, advocating a methodology involving chronology by Babylonian astrological

Difficult to characterize in his historiographical outlook is the distinguished American New Testament critic, F. C. Grant. While Grant's only life of Jesus[56] was beamed toward a popular audience, his important scholarly contributions have centered in Gospel backgrounds and criticism.[57] At times Grant plainly shares the ideals of the historicist tradition. Notably, his apprehensions about the distorting influence of theological interpretation may be cited as the legacy of historicism. In 1940 Grant could attack ". . . Barthianism, with its monstrous misinterpretation of the Gospel,"[58] because of its undercutting of the historical Jesus which ultimately severed the nerve of social righteousness.[59] He insisted that such a brand of "theological

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evidence, environmental study, Gospel criticism, and Aramaic retranslation, he confidently affirmed: "At long last, Jesus makes his own appearance in the full light of history." See A. T. Olmstead, Jesus in the Light of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), pp. vii-xi.

[56] F. C. Grant, The Life and Times of Jesus (in The Abingdon Religious Education Texts, ed. D. G. Downey. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1921).

[57] For a bibliography of Grant's work through 1951, see Sherman E. Johnson (ed.), The Joy of Study: Papers on New Testament and Related Subjects Presented to Honor Frederick Clifton Grant (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 149-63.

[58] F. C. Grant, The Gospel of the Kingdom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. x.

[59] Ibid.

nihilism" could profit immensely by learning from the "virile American theology" a deeper concern for "the essential Gospel of Jesus" rather than for "the divergent later interpretations of that Gospel."[60]

At many points Grant may be seen as a champion of the classic socio-ethical portrait of Jesus. He was, to be sure, a chastened liberal, insisting that a stringent methodology be followed to prevent modernizing.[61] Yet he persistently attempted to detour the theological interpretation of Jesus to find an ethical touchstone in his human life and personality. His study of Mark was an attempt to pierce through Mark's theological portrait to the actual Jesus.[62] He found this figure to be the proclaimer of the gospel of a this-worldly social redemption,[63] and it is this socio-ethical message of Jesus which Grant prized. Thus he believed Mark to have obscured the essential message of

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[60] Ibid., p. 180.

[61] F. C. Grant, "Method in Studying Jesus' Social Teaching," Studies in Early Christianity, pp. 239-81. But cf. Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 150-52.

[62] F. C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel: Studies of the Evangelic Tradition at Its Point of Crystallization in Writing (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), pp. 231-52.

[63] Ibid. Cf. Grant, The Gospel of the Kingdom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 111-35.

Jesus "by substituting a theological idea--the person of Christ, conceived as the secret, mysterious 'Son of Man.'"[64] And Mark's error has persisted to the present. But for Grant, theology will not save society--as nineteen centuries of theology demonstrate.[65] This orientation explains both his continuing rejection of existential and theological interpretation[66] and his unbroken quest for the life of Jesus.[67] Grant's position, while of greater breadth and freedom than pure historicism, is nevertheless partially comprehended by that designation.

E. F. Scott appears also as a borderline figure. There is no doubt that he was aware of the theological purpose of the Gospel writers[68] and of the need for theological perception by the interpreter of them. Yet Scott believed that the central motive of the Gospels was to demonstrate the historical facts of Jesus' ministry which would serve to confirm the truth of the Christian faith:[69] "They wish to place the Christian faith on a basis of certainty, and nothing is certain but a fact."[70] Indeed, Scott can sharply separate the Gospels from the other Christian literature as the church's effort to distinguish formally between fact and interpretation.[71] Thus Scott is methodologically prepared to investigate in surprising detail the life of Jesus.[72] The crisis in Jesus' life, his probable thoughts, and his attitudes toward Judaism are historically accessible.

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[64] F. C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel: Studies of the Evangelic Tradition at Its Point of Crystallization in Writing (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 266.

[65] Ibid., p. 267. There is ample indication that Grant saw form criticism, a discipline of which he was an early American advocate, as a tool useful precisely for its ability to recover the real Jesus. See his Preface to Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ, trans. F. C. Grant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), pp. vii-viii.

[66] F. C. Grant, Ancient Judaism and the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 140-55.

[67] F. C. Grant, "The Jesus of History," USQR, XIV (1959), 1-16. Cf. F. C. Grant, "Jesus Christ," IDB, II, 869-96. Grant's view is that while a complete life of Jesus is impossible, "we still believe it to be possible to trace the general outlines of the life and the career, the teaching and the personality of Jesus of Nazareth." See F. C. Grant, "The Jesus of History," USQR, XIV (1959), 4.

This all-too-summary treatment of the position termed "unbroken historicism" will clearly indicate a basic continuity between this group and the dominant historiographical outlook of American critics from 1900 to 1930. Its stubborn persistence on the American scene in the face of an abrupt decline in Europe after World War I demands an examination of its causes.

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[68] E. F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), pp. 100-120.

[69] Ibid., pp. 74-99. Cf. E. F. Scott, The Validity of the Gospel Record (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 188-202.

[70] E. F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 97.

[71] E. F. Scott, The Validity of the Gospel Record (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 196.

[72] E. F. Scott, The Crisis in the Life of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).

Like the larger international Quest, the American search for the real Jesus is to be seen, on one level, as an effort to overthrow the power of creedal tradition. While the strength of Calvinism in America was felt on into the twentieth century, particularly in the Princeton School, by 1900 the acids of higher criticism were taking a fearful toll on the old orthodoxy. This threatening of orthodoxy led American Protestantism into a caustic battle between the "Fundamentalists" and the "Modernists," a battle which raged with intense heat on into the thirties.[73] In the hands of the liberal protagonists, historical criticism became a polemical bludgeon, exposing the weaknesses of the conservative position. It is not surprising that the liberal critics, with the trauma of the Fundamentalist controversy engraved on their memories, were disposed to see the theological critique of historicism as a threatening new biblicism. Such men as McCown, Grant, and Enslin repeatedly betray the conviction that only a relentless exclusion of theological concerns from the historian's work can preserve the power of disinterested research to discover truth.[74] It is difficult to escape the feeling in reading their strictures on theology that they have been conditioned under the duress of an earlier struggle.

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[73] Norman F. Furniss, _The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 177ff.

Again, one can scarcely avoid the conviction that behind the insistence that Jesus be portrayed in non-kerygmatic terms looms the shadow of liberal theology. In particular, the valuation of Jesus' own ethical teaching as an impulse toward social righteousness and a persistent view of Jesus' eschatology as centering in a this-worldly social redemption[75] appear to be rooted in liberalism's view of man and history. Also liberalism's stress on human autonomy, as opposed to revelation,[76] tended to place a premium upon the historian's ability to discover historical reality without recourse to theological considerations.

It would be simplistic, however, to designate historicism as the characteristic concern in American study of Jesus.[77] Admittedly, the eminence of its exponents, as well as their vigor, invites such a view. Yet the study of Jesus in America has not followed a single track in the years between 1930 and 1965. A modified historicism which has also been present will now be considered.

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[74] Representative of this tendency are the following: C. C. McCown, "Honest Interpretation," RM, I (1941), 303-14; F. C. Grant, "The Jesus of History," USQR, XIV (1959), 1-16; and Morton Enslin, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," JBR, XXX (1962), 219-33.

[75] Perrin, op. cit., pp. 49-52, 148-57.

[76] Cauthen, op. cit., pp. 11-14.

[77] Harrisville, op. cit., represents such a view. And

## III. MODIFIED HISTORICISM

The very nature of the task before the historian of Jesus militates against a pure historicism. Usually such a historian is committed to the Christian faith and in quite subtle ways softens the implications of thorough-going historicism in his scholarly pursuit. Certainly the undeniable strain of evangelical concern which has tinctured the American Quest[78] indicates a curious dissonance between theory and practice. Accordingly, there has existed a group of American Questers who exhibit the historicist image, but with a difference. Less doctrinaire about the ability of the historian to perceive historical facts in their naked givenness, they have felt the sting of the relativistic

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although he appealed to the criterion of universal citation as his principle of selection, Harrisville neglected such critics as John Knox and F. C. Grant. Their incompatibility with the concerns he describes in the American Quest suggests a degree of arbitrariness in his selection.

[78] Amos Wilder, "Biblical Hermeneutic and American Scholarship," Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954, W. Eltester, editor (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), pp. 24-32.

critique. Furthermore, they may be characterized by a measured response to the theological challenge of a dispassionate approach to ultimate concerns. Still, a basic allegiance--stubbornness, perhaps--to the historical method is attested to by their sustained unwillingness to sacrifice historical objectivity for the subjectivities which lurk behind theological interest. In short, this group represents a sort of half-way house between older historicism and theologically concerned history.

One of these figures, C. T. Craig, was, by 1938, growing sensitive to the crisis of a biblical research which had become so purely "scientific" as to lose its significance for faith.[79] He diagnosed the problem as centering in the question of whether the biblical material was divinely revelatory or simply one segment of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the West.[80] By 1943 Craig stated his belief that historicism "had run into bankruptcy."[81] Its extreme concentration on a theologically aloof historical research faintly disguised a reluctance to face more ultimate and inescapable issues that lay outside of empirical study. Yet Craig did not yield full assent to the theological resurgence which was under way. He held that it was "in grave danger of becoming a retreat to dogma."[82] Writing of the situation on the Continent in the late twenties, when "pneumatic" or "theological" exegesis was being called for, he said:

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[79] C. T. Craig, "Current Trends in New Testament Study," JBL, LVII (1938), 372-75. Other illustrations of the dissolution of positivistic history in American biblical studies might be cited. Perhaps the changed atmosphere which resulted from the theological resurgence is most dramatically reflected in the earlier bastion of historicism, the University of Chicago. The estrangement of biblical studies from theological concern began to break down in the years following World War II. A participant who reflects some of the painful reassessment forced upon the Divinity School is Bernard E. Meland, "A Time of Reckoning," JR, XXIX (1949), 1-4, and "A Long Look at the Divinity School and Its Present Crisis," Cr, I (1962), 25f.

[80] Ibid., 374f.

> . . . it soon became clear to all not suffering from extreme theological myopia that there was no sound substitute for historical principles of interpretation: there was no such thing as a special spiritual exegesis.[83]

He was expressing a typical American rejection of the Barthian retreat from history, and his position may be virtually reproduced by turning to the work of prominent leaders of the American Quest.

Henry J. Cadbury figures as one of the most attractive and perplexing of American critics of the New Testament.[84] He shares the historicist's disapproval of entangling alliances between history and theology,[85] yet his extremely cautious statement of this presupposition, as well as certain statements which indicate a degree of openness to the theological dimension of historiography, merits his assignment to the category of modified historicism.

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[81] C. T. Craig, "Biblical Theology and the Rise of Historicism," JBL, LXII (1943), 294.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 291.

[84] Witty and judicious, Cadbury is consistently stimulating in his books and articles. He has combined solid

Cadbury has taken with all seriousness the historian's subjective distortion of the past.[86] He affirmed that the tendency of the historian to discover in Jesus those values and thought patterns to which he himself is committed is inevitable and not entirely curable. Hence the note of historical optimism so characteristic of the American Quest is largely absent from Cadbury's work.[87] There is, rather, an

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competence with cautious judgment, a sparkling literary sense with a stubborn refusal to follow theological fads. Cf. Henry C. Niles, "The Wit and Wisdom of Henry Joel Cadbury," HDSB, XXIX (1949), 35-48.

[85] For a good example, see Henry J. Cadbury, The Eclipse of the Historical Jesus (Haverford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Publications, 1964) [hereafter cited as Eclipse], p. 32.

[86] This theme is a scarlet thread running through Cadbury's writing. See his The Peril of Modernizing Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company) [hereafter cited as Peril]; "The Peril of Archaizing Ourselves," Interp, III (1949), 331-37; "Some Foibles of New Testament Scholarship," JBR, XXVI (1958), 213-16; "Gospel Study and Our Image of Early Christianity," JBL, LXXXIII (1964), 139-45; and Eclipse.

[87] His own statement is quite revealing: "That I may have prejudices too I would be the first to admit, and I ought at least to know as well as anyone the difficulties of judgment which beset any verdict concerning

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extreme sensitivity to the relativities of the historian's judgment.

But rather than driving the biographer of Jesus to a theoretical despair, this state of affairs prompts Cadbury to attempt, as far as possible, a recovery of objectivity. This involves (1) an awareness of one's presuppositions and prejudices; (2) a recovery of Jesus' thought world; and (3) careful historical labor in the Gospels.[88] On these premises, Cadbury is enabled to explore Jesus, and especially his religious life, at some length.[89]

Although The Peril of Modernizing Jesus was directed in part against a nascent Neo-Orthodoxy, there may be found at its conclusion the admission that the Gospels maintain "an inseparable synthesis of faith and history."[90] Somewhat guardedly, Cadbury describes the relation of faith and history as "a problem that cannot be disposed of in a few words."[91] Yet it becomes clear that he regards the two as

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even simple and apparently objective matters connected with Jesus of Nazareth." In Henry J. Cadbury, Jesus: What Manner of Man (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947) [hereafter cited as Jesus], p. ix.

[88] Cadbury, Peril, pp. 42-48.

[89] Cadbury, Peril, pp. 154-93; Jesus, pp. 101-23. Note, however, the mood of caution that modifies these treatments.

[90] Cadbury, Peril, p. 192.

[91] Ibid.

separate, though necessary, enterprises. Religious faith is important but it must not be allowed to usurp the autonomy of the historian.[92] He rejects the attempt to connect the Jesus of history with the kerygmatic Christ as theological wishful thinking.[93]

Another student of Jesus' life who is to be placed along the middle of our spectrum is E. C. Colwell. Colwell held a view of the relation of faith to the historian's study quite similar to Cadbury's. As late as 1962 he opened the Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt University with this freighted sentence: "These lectures are written by an historian who is a Christian, not a Biblical theologian."[94] Colwell's chary regard for biblical theology was manifest in his prospectus for New Testament scholarship. He believed that the historical particularity of the Bible was being obscured by the imposition of systematic theological categories.[95] This fault, he predicted, boded ill for the survival of biblical theology.[96]

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[92] Ibid., p. 193.

[93] Cadbury, Eclipse, p. 32.

[94] E. C. Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963) [hereafter cited as Jesus and the Gospel], p. vii.

[95] E. C. Colwell, "New Testament Scholarship in Prospect," JBR, XXVIII (1960), 202.

[96] Ibid., pp. 202f.

Yet it is clear that Colwell has passed through the fires of change. He does not speak with the voice of older historicism. Quite plainly he states that the once-desiderated stance of complete historical objectivity was an impossible dream.[97] He further states his conviction that "the understanding of history in depth is possible only to the man who can/or will see God."[98] But alongside this view is a persistent attempt to recover the figure of Jesus by historical means in a way that emphasizes the pre-kerygmatic Jesus.[99] This neo-liberal outlook finds the crucial importance of Jesus to be in what his life revealed about God. In Colwell's words:

> But the resurrection experiences did not create that faith; they gave it a new definition. Faith in Jesus as a figure of epochal importance was born in his lifetime, before the cross. Without it the resurrection experiences would not have been possible.[100]

E. F. Scott and F. C. Grant, treated in the previous category as historicists, give forth uncertain sounds which indicate that they were not historicists pure and simple. Scott could write that "there is no such thing, indeed, as a bare fact." He recognized that the Gospels, while primarily written to give historical evidence for faith,[101] could not be fully comprehended apart from an attitude of faith.[102]

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[97] E. C. Colwell, An Approach to the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), pp. 40f.

[98] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel, p. viii.

[99] *Ibid*., pp. 21-27, 42-57.

[100] E. C. Colwell, An Approach to the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), p. 122.

F. C. Grant reveals a similar, if less pronounced, vascillation. His form critical work convinced him that there could no longer exist the dream of discovering beneath the Gospels untheologized accounts about Jesus of Nazareth.[103] Furthermore, he grasped the significance of Jesus as the source of a mighty stream of religious faith.[104] Thus, there was in Jesus a *plus ultra* that historical study alone cannot grasp. Grant affirmed, on the one hand, that the scholar is "not to permit pure biblical science from becoming contaminated with theological or dogmatic considerations."[105] Nevertheless, he could declare that the religious impulse of the "*Spirit* of Jesus, living on in the Church, was one with the historical Jesus."[106] Grant's recognition of the limits of historical research in recovering the meaning of Jesus, when combined with contradictory statements of unguarded historicism,[107] reveals an antinomy in his historiography which oscillates between historicism and modified historicism.[108]

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[101] E. F. Scott, *The Purpose of the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 100.

[102] *Ibid*., pp. 100f.

[103] F. C. Grant, "The Spiritual Christ," *JBL*, LIV (1935), 2.

[104] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[105] *Ibid*., p. 12.

[106] *Ibid*., p. 13.

Donald T. Rowlingson has maintained a continuing concern for the historical Jesus. His viewpoint is squarely in the heritage of older liberalism. He believed that not only was the recovery of Jesus' life the pressing problem of Christian faith; it was also recoverable.[109] This actual historical Jesus must serve to correct all speculative Christologies, for they began with a historical figure.[110] Although he believed Jesus to be best described in purely human terms--a religious genius--there remains about his life a "profound mystery" that cannot be plumbed.[111]

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[107] Cf. ante, pp. 170-72.

[108] Cf. Grant's later works: The Gospels: Their Origin and Growth (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1957), pp. 11-21; Ancient Judaism and the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 140-55; and "Biblical Theology and the Synoptic Problem," Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper, William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, editors (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 88-90.

[109] Donald T. Rowlingson, "The Continuing Quest of the Historical Jesus," New Testament Studies: Critical Essays in New Testament Interpretation, with Special Reference to the Meaning and Worth of Jesus, Edwin P. Booth, editor (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), pp. 68f.

[110] Donald T. Rowlingson, "The Gospel Perspective and the Quest of the Historical Jesus," JBR, XXXIII (1965), 334f.

[111] Donald T. Rowlingson, Jesus the Religious Ultimate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 18.

Very difficult to assess is the historiographical stance of Amos Wilder. While he will be treated in a later section of this dissertation, he best represents a position of modified historicism. In a highly creative tension between American socio-historical allegiance and a sensitivity to the inadequacy of historicism, Wilder labors to fashion a hermeneutic that will do justice to both the historical actualities of Jesus' life and to their deeper significance.[112] Wilder has clearly broken with older historicism,[113] yet he firmly insists, against all forms of kerygmatic theology, that the historian must "pursue down into the web of second causes the modes of grace. . . ."[114] By this he means that, historically speaking, the biblical revelation can be understood as the product of social and psychological forces. To this degree he reflects his early connection with the "Chicago School." This outlook enables him to note with approval the American tradition of empiricism, with its glorying in hard facts.[115] He is thereby more inclined to understand Jesus' life in the framework of formative cultural factors than from a frankly theological viewpoint.[116]

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[112] Wilder, _loc_. _cit_.

[113] See, for example, Amos N. Wilder, "New Testament Theology in Transition," _The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow_, Harold R. Willoughby, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 427-36. Cf. _post_, pp. 196f.

[114] Amos N. Wilder, "Biblical Hermeneutic and American Scholarship," _Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954_, W. Eltester, editor (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), p. 30.

## IV. THEOLOGICAL CONCERN

The unique way in which American biblical studies developed accounts for certain peculiarities of the theological inroads on biblical science as experienced on this side of the Atlantic. The earlier chapters of this dissertation traced the fierce struggle for the rights of historical criticism. This struggle tended to polarize the "neutral critics" and the "prejudiced biblicists" in a way that bred mutual suspicion. The critic feared the shackles of a theology which precluded historical investigation; the biblicist trembled for the weal of his faith. Yet at the same time, American biblical studies, though identified with theological liberalism, were never as effectively divorced from evangelical concerns as they were in Germany.[117] Furthermore, historical skepticism was relatively mild in the American Quest, even after the advent of form criticism. These factors partly explain both the belatedness and the relative moderation of the theological critique of historicism in its American expression.[118]

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[115] _Ibid_., pp. 28-32.

[116] At times one feels that Wilder believes a poetic and imaginative empathy will reveal the ultimate dimensions of the biblical revelation: _New Testament Faith for Today_ (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 167f.

[117] Wilder, _op_. _cit_., pp. 26f.

## Methodological Discontent with Historicism

A fundamental questioning of the adequacy of the historical-critical methodology to grasp the really significant dimension of the New Testament was becoming insistent in America after World War II.[119] In 1946 Paul Minear insisted that the discerning exegete must submit his world view to judgment by the biblical perspective. The very "otherness" of the biblical outlook, generally offensive to modern minds, became, he declared, strangely revelatory when viewed in obedient empathy.[120] Minear later stated that the biblical historian "must make his goal that of entering fully into the thought-world of the period that he is studying."[121] He was speaking not so much of historical empathy as of the ultimate validity of biblical thought patterns. He charged "rationalistic historicism" with captivity to a method which fails to comprehend the theological dimension of history.[122] The presuppositions upon which scientific historiography rest, he believed, were incapable of apprehending transcendent levels of meaning and therefore should be revised.[123] Thus, faith became almost a methodological principle for Minear.[124]

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[118] Where the sway of positivistic historicism achieved a more dominant permeation of biblical studies, the reaction was correspondingly more forcible. Note the explosive situation in Germany as described in Thomas W. Ogletree, Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 81-97.

[119] Besides Minear's contribution, which will be discussed, note Otto A. Piper, "What the Bible Means to Me," CC, LXIII (1946), 266-68; 299-301; 334-36; 362-64, and the heated reply by Morton Enslin, "Dr. Piper's Bible," CC, LXIII (1946), 460-62. Cf. a later exchange between Filson and Pfeiffer in 1950-51: Floyd V. Filson, "Method in Studying Biblical History," JBL, LXXIX (1950), 1-18, and Robert H. Pfeiffer, "Facts and Faith in Biblical History," JBL, LXX (1951), 1-14.

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[120] Paul S. Minear, Eyes of Faith: A Study in the Biblical Point of View (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 1-7. For a perceptive analysis of Minear's contribution to hermeneutics, see C. Freeman Sleeper, "Some American Contributions to New Testament Interpretation," Interp, XX (1966), 322-29, 337-39.

[121] Paul S. Minear, The Kingdom and the Power: An Exposition of the New Testament Gospel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 260.

[122] Paul S. Minear, The Interpreter and the Birth Narratives (Symbolae Biblicae Upsalienses, Supplementhäften till Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok, 13. Uppsala: Wretmans Boktryckeri A.-B., 1950), p. 22.

[123] Paul S. Minear, "Christian Eschatology and Historical Methodology," Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954 (2. berichtigte Auflage. Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1957), pp. 18-23.

[124] Cf. Sleeper, op. cit., p. 324.

Like Minear, Richard R. Niebuhr issued a challenge to the presuppositions of critical historiography,[125] though from a different footing. He took as his starting point the Resurrection of Jesus. Noting the rejection of the Resurrection as a historical event by the historical-critical method which dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the subsequent removal of the Resurrection to a special realm of history by recent theologians, Niebuhr asks if a reassessment of the presuppositional background of critical historiography might not be a more cogent approach. Dominated by models drawn from natural science, the orthodox critical historiography was seen by Niebuhr as in need of a revision that would allow for the possibility of historical uniqueness. Rather than accommodating the Resurrection to fit a circumscribed historical mold, let the historian enlarge his historiography to encompass the real historical occurrence of the Resurrection. It is evident that Niebuhr issued a challenge to the methodological foundations of historicism.[126]

This protest against positivistic historiography's domination of historical criticism has continued to gain momentum in America. The increasing sensitivity to the crisis of historicism is the result of both a more intimate conversation with European theology and a more critical attitude toward criticism. Howard C. Kee, for example, criticized positivism's "specious claim to scientific objectivity";[127] and affirmed that the "work of the historical critic is not merely propaedeutic to theology; it is itself authentically theological."[128]

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[125] Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason: A Study of Theological Method (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

[126] See ibid., pp. 89ff.

Roy A. Harrisville has insisted that the dimension of faith cannot be theoretically separated from the historian's analysis of the Resurrection.[129] Carl E. Braaten called for an end to historical criticism's bondage to positivistic historicism: "The separation between the historical method and the Biblical history of revelation is unacceptable for methodological and theological reasons."[130] Behind all of these criticisms of the theoretical pilings upon which historicism rested lay a growing malaise with its quarantine of theology. What was the effect of this unrest upon life of Jesus study? It opened the way for a growing number of front-rank scholars--not of the older conservative ilk--consciously to permit the faith-claims of the Gospels to engage the historian's attention.

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[127] Howard C. Kee, "Historical Criticism and Theological Affirmation: The Broad, Ugly Ditch," DG, XXXII (1961), 12.

[128] Ibid., p. 24.

[129] Roy A. Harrisville, "Resurrection and Historical Method," Dialog, I (1962), 30-37.

[130] Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics (Vol. II of New Directions in Theology Today, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-), p. 43.

## Jesus in Historical-Theological Perspective

Floyd Filson, who held conservative views of biblical historicity,[131] was an early exponent of biblical theology in New Testament study. He insisted that the study of Christian origins would eventuate in failure unless the scholar was willing to entertain a committed view such as the New Testament gives.[132] He saw the central task of New Testament study to be the relating of history and theology.[133] Filson's treatment of the historical Jesus is accordingly permeated with the question of its theological meaning.[134] His embrace of theology did not appreciably lessen Filson's concern for the historical dimension of Jesus' life, however. Indeed, the maintained an extremely high valuation of the historical motives of the Gospels.[135]

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[131] See Floyd V. Filson, One Lord One Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), pp. 1-42, and The New Testament against Its Environment: The Gospel of Christ the Risen Lord (Studies in Biblical Theology No. 3. London: S C M Press, 1950).

[132] Floyd V. Filson, "The Central Problem concerning Christian Origins," The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, Harold R. Willoughby, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 343f. Cf. Floyd V. Filson, "Method in Studying Biblical History," JBL, LXIX (1950), 1-18.

[133] Floyd V. Filson, "The Study of the New Testament," Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century: Whence and Whither? Arnold S. Nash, editor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 67f.

Similar in outlook is the approach of John Wick Bowman. Although Bowman thoroughly rejected dialectical theology,[136] he welcomed the theological critique of positivistic historiography, and in fact embraced a form of Heilsgeschichte which he preferred to call "Prophetic Realism."[137] But Bowman does not seem to bear the marks of a struggle with historiography. His chief concern seems to have been the demonstration of a fundamental continuity between Jesus' modes of thought and that of the Hebraic-prophetic stream.[138] His significance is primarily that of a weathervane. In his work it is clear that a shift from classic historicism has taken place. His interest in Jesus' life and teachings is admittedly theological.

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[134] Floyd V. Filson, One Lord One Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), and Jesus Christ the Risen Lord (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956).

[135] Ibid. One suspects that the appeal of biblical theology to Filson was its theological conservativism, a conservatism which he extended to historical matters. Cf. Filson's dual concern for kerygma and history in his "Response to James M. Robinson's 'Kerygma and History in the New Testament,'" The Bible and Modern Scholarship, J. Philip Hyatt, editor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 160-65.

[136] See John W. Bowman, "From Schweitzer to Bultmann," TTod, XI (1954-55), 163, and Prophetic Realism and the Gospel: A Preface to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 34-41.

[137] Ibid., pp. 41-47. In the two works of Bowman cited in footnote 136 above, he is plainly attempting to rally a full theological movement.

Probably no American biographer of Jesus has struggled more seriously with the framing of an adequate historiography for apprehending Jesus' life than has John Knox.[139] Knox felt the tension between the Christian's faith in Christ and the knowledge concerning his life which was mediated through historical study.[140] His solution of this problem took two general lines. First, he denied the accessibility of what classic historicism set as its goal--the recovery of what actually happened:

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[138] See Bowman's following works: *The Intention of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), *The Religion of Maturity* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), *Jesus' Teaching in Its Environment* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), and "The Life and Teaching of Jesus," *PCB*, pp. 733-48.

[139] One possible exception is James M. Robinson, though his published work does not bear the unity of theme that marks Knox's. One wonders if there can be any justification for leaving Knox out of a discussion of representative lives of Jesus in America as Harrisville has done, unless his approach was simply inimical to Harrisville's described syndrome of positivistic outlook. See Roy A. Harrisville, "Representative American Lives of Jesus," *HJKC*, pp. 172-96. For orientation to Knox's thought see D. H. Nineham, "Theologians of our Time; VI. John Knox," *ET*, LXXIV (1963), 234-38; W. Norman Pittenger, "Some Implications, Philosophical and Theological, in John Knox's Writing," *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr, editors (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967), pp. 3-16, and Daniel D. Williams, "John Knox's Conception of History," *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr, editors (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967), pp. 17-34.

> If there is such a thing as a "bare fact," certainly we cannot know one. If there is such a thing as a merely objective event, certainly we can have no knowledge of it as such. History and interpretation, distinguishable in idea, cannot in fact be separated.[141]

Here is a frank denial that historical method can penetrate to a factual core of uninterpreted history. For Knox the event of Jesus Christ encompasses the witnessing memory of the Church. Thus, the crucial event of the Resurrection cannot be separated from the Church's testimony to it. In fact, Knox can identify the essential meaning of the Resurrection with the birth of the Church.[142] The creation of a new community is the indisputable, objective testimony to the reality of the Resurrection event.[143]

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[140] See especially John Knox, Criticism and Faith (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), pp. 43-58.

[141] John Knox, Jesus Lord and Christ (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 63. This volume is a trilogy of Knox's earlier works: The Man Christ Jesus (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1941); Christ the Lord: The Meaning of Jesus in the Early Church (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1945); and On the Meaning of Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

[142] John Knox, The Death of Christ: The Cross in New Testament History and Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 182.

[143] John Knox, The Church and the Reality of Christ (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 42.

Knox's second major concern is to establish the security of faith in its relation to historical research. His solution is quite candidly apologetic. Like Tillich--his colleague at Union Seminary--Knox appears to embrace a Kähler-like confidence in the testimony of the Church.[144] While quite cautious in assessing the detailed accuracy of the Gospels,[145] Knox maintains that the communal memory of the Church guarantees the preservation of the important aspect of felt meaning of the event of Christ. One's participation in the life of the Church is the only means of grasping the historical meaning of Jesus' life.[146]

Knox's career embodies a dramatic volte face from historicism. Trained under Goodspeed and Case at Chicago, where historicism reached its zenith in America, Knox has moved to a historiography which demands that the historian adopt a stance of commitment if he would grasp the fullness of Jesus' history. Yet it becomes evident that Knox envisages two "levels" of history as it were. The one involves matters of detail such as the date of the crucifixion, for example. This kind of datum is within the province of any critical historian,[147] and Knox has engaged in this level of historical study with an unusually stringent critical method.[148] The Christ of the kerygma, on the other hand, is mediated only through the believing community. Thus, there appears to be in Knox's thought a bifurcation of the ontology of history, the price that has generally been paid by those maintaining a Historie-Geschichte distinction.[149]

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[144] John Knox, Criticism and Faith (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), pp. 26-42, and The Church and the Reality of Christ (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 37-59.

[145] Cf. John Knox, The Death of Christ: The Cross in New Testament History and Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 15-30.

[146] John Knox, The Church and the Reality of Christ (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 42.

Far less willing to adopt a confessional approach to historiography is Amos Wilder, who fears that recent theological preoccupation will uproot Jesus and his teaching from their this-worldly connections,[150] thrusting them into the abstract realm of timeless truths. Yet it must be noted that Wilder allows, albeit cautiously, for a theological aspect of the historian's task. It is unusually difficult to judge the extent of this recognition in his writing. Due to his special concern for recognizing the deeper levels of dramatic symbolism that surge up through the biblical imagery, the precise nature of what he calls "primal forces that underlie historical events"[151] remains somewhat ambiguous. Certain passages, however, point unmistakably to a theological reference:

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[147] John Knox, Criticism and Faith (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 50. Here Knox is quite willing to see the historian as capable of approaching a historical question without allowing his theological stance to play a determinative role; he can raise "purely historical" questions. It is at this point that the legacy of historicism has left its deepest imprint upon him.

[148] For example, John Knox, The Death of Jesus: The Cross in New Testament History and Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 77-107.

[149] Cf. Heinrich Ott, "The Historical Jesus and the Ontology of History," HJKC, pp. 142-71.

[150] Cf. Amos N. Wilder, New Testament Faith for Today (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 168f.

> Even where there is no disposition to limit critical analysis and empirical investigation as far as these tools can go, our existence especially in its religious aspects ultimately baffles scrutiny or exposition in these [naturalistic] terms. Here is the justification of categories of transcendence, indeed of metaphysical transcendence excluded by McCown in his discussion.[152]

To this extent, Wilder may justifiably be considered as assenting to a theological dimension in the historian's task. But since this dimension is so cautiously accepted, and since his central concern is to establish a more credible anthropology and a more poetic hermeneutic,[153] it is best to see him as a representative of modified historicism.

There has been in America an accelerating shift toward a frankly confessional approach to the problem of Jesus' life, the impulse of which seems to be the rediscovery of Martin Kähler. Here the methods of critical historiography are viewed as basically incapable of portraying the full reality of Jesus Christ. Paul Tillich, a student of Kähler's, appears to have adopted a modified form of Kähler's thesis, arguing that historical criticism, apart from faith, cannot provide the certitude concerning Jesus which is necessary for faith.[154] Tillich, in turn, has influenced the view of his colleague John Knox, while both have helped to shape the outlook of W. Norman Pittenger. Pittenger, like a growing number of recent American critics, seeks to fuse Christological study with a strong concern for the historical Jesus.[155] His historiographical ideal involves commitment as a methodological principle:

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[151] Amos N. Wilder, _Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus_ (revised edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 64.

[152] _Ibid_.

[153] Cf. Amos N. Wilder, "The Word as Address and the Word as Meaning," _New H_, pp. 215-18, and "The New Quest for the Historical Jesus," _CCr_, XXII (1962-63), 225f.

> We read the Bible as a document of faith, a faith based indeed on historical happenings, but a faith which sees

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[154] See Tillich's foreword to Martin Kähler, _The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ_, translated, edited, and introduced by Carl E. Braaten (in Seminar Editions, gen. ed. Theodore Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. xi-xii. Cf. A. T. Mollegen, "Christology and Biblical Criticism in Tillich," _The Theology of Paul Tillich_, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, editors (Vol. I of _The Library of Living Theology_. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952-), pp. 231-37.

[155] Cf. W. Norman Pittenger, _The Word Incarnate: A Study of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ_ (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1959), pp. 48-98.

more deeply into the meaning of history than any chronicler could hope.[156]

Carl E. Braaten, while not a New Testament specialist, is vitally concerned with the recent theological discussion involving faith and history in its Christological aspects.[157] Braaten addresses himself to the problem of attempting to establish historically a continuity between the Jesus of history and the kerygmatic Christ from a stance strongly influenced by Kähler. He faults the tendency of the New Quest to seek escape from the necessarily confessional solution to the continuity problem.[158] For Braaten, the recovery of the real Jesus by historical criticism would neither help nor hinder faith. Thus, for this American critic the critique of historicism cannot be too stringent. Historicism's theoretical villain--theological engagement--is for him the ultimate key to the mystery of

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[156] W. Norman Pittenger, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," ATR, XXXVI (1954), 93. For a similar view by another Anglican scholar, see Sherman E. Johnson, Jesus in His Homeland (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 161-77.

[157] Carl E. Braaten, "Martin Kähler on the Historic Biblical Christ," HJKC, pp. 79-105, and History and Hermeneutics (Vol. II of New Directions in Theology Today, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-), pp. 53-77.

[158] Carl E. Braaten, "Martin Kähler on the Historic Biblical Christ," HJKC, p. 103: "The solution to this problem [continuity between Jesus of history and the Christ of faith] happens only in the act of confessing Jesus as Lord."

Jesus.

## V. CONCLUSION

Having been led in the twentieth century to adopt the historiographical ideal of theological neutrality, the main force of the American Quest was, by 1930, in the camp of historicism. Intellectual survival had demanded of the biblical critic in America an allegiance to the dream of scientific objectivity in his pursuit of the Jesus of history. Under the aegis of a positivistic view of history which consciously eliminated the theological dimension of "over-belief," he could attempt to recover the actual Jesus of history. Yet the world view of historicism, as its implications became more and more manifest, began to threaten, so it appeared, the foundations of Christian faith. The reaction of the dialectical theologians was symptomatic. Barth's protest, in particular, was a declaration of the inability of neutral historical science to grasp the full reality of Jesus.[159] Thus, the years between 1930 and 1965 may be characterized as transitional for the study of Jesus in America. The general response to the call for theological engagement was at first generally hostile. The axiom of historical objectivity was revered and theological interests were interpreted as distorting weaknesses, if not crass biblicism. There remains until the present a strong undercurrent of loyalty to historicism's ideals in such men as Enslin, Cadbury, and F. C. Grant. And even in those American scholars who have recognized the failure of historicism, there is a disposition to ground the life of Jesus in the concreteness and relativity of one given historical moment; to see his life profoundly rooted in real history. However, the collective influence of the biblical theology movement, the theology of the kerygma, and the New Quest has progressively shifted the dominant historiographical mood of the American Quest toward a theological openness. Although historicism has been quite resilient[160] in American biblical study, there exists a growing willingness to wrestle with theological problems that inhere in the study of Jesus. These include both a questioning of the appropriateness of the structures of a positivistic historiography to grasp the historical reality of Jesus, and a reassessment of the validity of the ideal of neutrality. This theological critique of historicism has been fairly concurrent with a second factor which has eroded the foundation of historicism: the growth of an existentialist historiography. It is to this subject that the next chapter turns.

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[159] Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins: A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 23f.

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[160] _Ibid_., pp. 61-76.

# CHAPTER VI

# AN ATTEMPTED SYNTHESIS BETWEEN HISTORY AND THEOLOGY: THE NEW QUEST IN AMERICA,

## 1953-1965

The previous chapter described a theological critique of objective historiography emerging in the years between 1930 and 1965. Historicism, the dominant critical stance, came to be viewed by a small but significant segment of American biblical scholars as fundamentally inadequate for grasping the full significance of the historical Jesus, shifting the axis of historicism toward a less pronounced degree of self-confidence. But in spite of the recognition of problems impeding the pursuit of the historical Jesus, the American Quest did not cease. There remained both a continuing fascination with the aims of the older Quest and the unbroken production of lives not basically distinct from those of the nineteenth century Quest.[1] Implicit in this uninterrupted American Quest--and frequently explicit[2]--was a protest against the massive and influential German abandonment of the Quest as a historical impossibility and a theological irrelevancy.

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[1] Note, for example, the following: Donald T. Rowlingson, Jesus the Religious Ultimate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961); Morton Enslin, The Prophet from Nazareth (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961); and S. Vernon McCasland, The Pioneer of Our Faith (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964).

[2] Quite outspoken in this viewpoint is Morton Enslin, who remains a thoroughly unrepentant liberal in his valua-

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Justifications for the Topic

Since the older Quest never really ended in America, it might seem ill-advised to devote a chapter to the New Quest in America, especially since there is but one major American proponent of this post-Bultmannian movement, and his role has been largely that of mediating a German movement to the American scene.[3] Several considerations, however, serve to validate the appropriateness of discussing the New Quest as it has fared on this side of the Atlantic. First of all, the "uninterrupted Quest" is not quite so all-pervasive a feature of the American scene as is generally intimated. The liberal historical-critical school in America--a stronghold of the classical Quest--was viewed as

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tion of the real, historical Jesus. See especially his article, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," JBR, XXX (1962), 219-33. Cf. Henry J. Cadbury, Eclipse, and F. C. Grant, "The Jesus of History," USQR, XIV (1959), 1-16.

[3] James M. Robinson is, of course, the figure referred to. His programmatic essay gave this post-Bultmannian movement its name: A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (Studies in Biblical Theology No. 25. London: S C M Press, Limited, 1959) [hereafter cited as NQHJ].

a declining force by F. C. Grant, one of its greatest advocates, in the years following World War II.[4] Likewise, Henry J. Cadbury, in an article surveying a half-century of New Testament study,[5] declared that the recent kerygmatic interest in the Gospels had curtailed the vigor of the American Quest.[6] Hence, it would be mistaken to view the New Quest proposal as irrelevant to the situation of the American scene.

Second, the general postponement of the Bultmannian influence in America[7] seems to have ended at last. The post-Bultmannian atmosphere--in which the New Quest would presumably thrive best--has become increasingly evident in recent dialogue between American critics and the Bultmannian circle.[8] One may reasonably expect that the issues raised by the New Quest will receive increasing attention in American theology.[9] In this connection, the publication of an

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[4] See, e.g., F. C. Grant, Ancient Judaism and the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 148f.

[5] Henry J. Cadbury, "New Testament Scholarship: Fifty Years in Retrospect," JBR, XXVIII (1960), 192-98.

[6] Ibid., p. 196.

[7] Bultmann's influential New Testament theology was not translated into English until the years 1951-1955. John Knox confesses that as late as 1953 he had not read any of Bultmann's theological or hermeneutical works. See John Knox, The Death of Christ: The Cross in New Testament History and Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 175. While American biblical scholarship has in the past hundred years lived in constant touch with German theological science, there has also been a certain mood of independence. Following both World Wars the presidential addresses to the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis prophesied the end of American dependence upon German scholarship. In 1918, James Montgomery declared: "We can no longer go to school to a nation against which we feel a moral revulsion." See "Present Tasks of American Biblical Scholarship," JBL, XXXVIII (1919), 8. In 1945, Morton Enslin spoke of the end of German biblical studies: "To put it brutally: as I have suggested, there is a deal of talk that biblical scholarship has collapsed in Europe, that it is up to America to carry

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on. To this I agree. . . ." "The Future of Biblical Studies," *JBL*, LXV (1946), 10. Similarly, W. F. Albright saw World War II as effecting the "virtual suppression of Germany as a normative intellectual center for the generation now growing up." "The War in Europe and the Future of Biblical Studies," *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow*, Harold R. Willoughby, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 162.

[8] One could easily document the strong influence of Bultmann upon such diverse scholars as Kendrick Grobel, R. H. Fuller, James M. Robinson, Norman Perrin, Carl Michaelson, and Schubert Ogden. Quite recently, theological debates which are thoroughly German in context have been injected into the American milieu. It is now possible to point to an informed American literature on the demythologizing debate, the New Hermeneutic, and, not least, the New Quest. See the following: Schubert Ogden, *Christ without Myth: A Study Based on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961); Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (trans. and eds.), *Kerygma and History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962); Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (eds.), *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964); Robinson, NQHJ; James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb (eds.), *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (Vol. I of *New Frontiers in Theology: Discussions among Continental and American Theologians*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. 4 vols.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963-); volumes II and III of the same series: *New H* and *Theology as History* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1967); and Carl E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Vol. II of *New Directions in Theology Today*, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-).

[9] An excellent American survey of recent New Testament

intramural American debate[10] indicates the pertinence of the issues raised by the New Quest to an American context. While there has not yet been an extensive participation in this discussion, it seems certain that a franker confrontation with the issues involved would expose an existing cleavage of large proportions in American New Testament scholarship.

Finally, a study of the American response accorded the New Quest will serve to identify historiographical presuppositions, illuminating both latent American tendencies and more recent attitudes. On this assumption, the New Quest will provide a well-defined historiographical option in relation to which the American responses may instructively be viewed.

Having attempted to justify the importance of the New Quest as a live factor in American scholarship, the present chapter will proceed to sketch the context of the New Quest,

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study confirms this judgment. The New Quest is allotted more pages than any other trend of New Testament study in R. H. Fuller's *The New Testament in Current Study* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962).

[10] The *Journal of the Bible and Religion* published a symposium on the New Quest in 1962 composed of the following articles: James M. Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" *JBR*, XXX (1962), 198-208; Schubert Ogden, "Bultmann and the 'New Quest,'" *JBR*, XXX (1962), 209-18; and Morton Enslin, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," *JBR*, XXX (1962), 219-33.

to explore in particular any American contributions, and to describe the historiographical positions which crystallize in the American discussion.

## The Main Lines of the New Quest

The purpose of this section is not to describe exhaustively the factors which figure in the New Quest. It seeks, rather, to place the movement in its broad setting[11] in order to provide a context from which to view the American discussion.

The New Quest may be described as a movement springing from a German--indeed a Bultmannian--milieu. It presupposes the futility of the classical Quest as a historical possibility. It was spearheaded by Bultmann's own pupils, attempting to go beyond, not around, the Bultmannian legacy. Thus, it is characterized by a thorough loyalty to radical criticism, and is profoundly identified with an existentialist posture.

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[11] The treatment in Robinson, *NQHJ*, provides the standard orientation on the origins of the New Quest. Later developments are admirably treated in James M. Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" *JBR*, XXX (1962), 198-208; Raymond E. Brown, "After Bultmann, What? - An Introduction to the Post Bultmannians," *CBQ*, XXVI (1964), 1-30; and J. B. Bedenbaugh, "The First Decade of the New Quest of the Historical Jesus," *LQ*, XVI (1964), 239-67. Robinson's most recent treatment, which falls outside the closing date of this dissertation, is a thorough revision of an earlier work; it includes an analysis of major developments in the New Quest, discussion with his critics, and a sharpening of his own position: James M. Robinson, *Kerygma und historischer Jesus* (2. berichtigte Auflage; Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1967).

The New Quest was set in motion by Ernst Käsemann's address to the "old Marburgers" in 1953.[12] Käsemann urged a renewed investigation of the admittedly sparse, but nonetheless important, data concerning the historical Jesus. Following Käsemann's challenge to the time-honored cloture of the Quest by Bultmann, a prestigious band of Bultmannian pupils followed his lead. Leaders of the New Quest include, besides Käsemann, Gunther Bornkamm, Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, Herbert Braun, and James M. Robinson.

The issues involved in the New Quest arise most directly from a vexing antinomy within Bultmann's own thought[13] and a dissatisfaction with his solution to the relation between the historical Jesus and the church's kerygma. Bultmann discovers the absolute center of the Christian faith in the kerygma. The kerygma, in turn, is properly understood only when it is demythologized and existentially interpreted.[14] Although the kerygma is posited upon the conviction that in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth God has acted, this is absolutely unverifiable from the standpoint of historical research.[15] Faith is granted no support outside itself and is false to itself whenever it seeks such external securities; the truth of the kerygma's claims can be authenticated only in the risk of commitment.

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[12] Ernst Käsemann, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," ZTK, LI (1954), 125-53. This essay appears in Käsemann's Essays on New Testament Themes (Studies in Biblical Theology No. 41. London: S C M Press, Limited, 1964), pp. 15-47.

[13] Fuller, op. cit., pp. 37-39. The antinomy is that of plainly affirming that the act of God to which the kerygma testifies was inseparably related to a concrete figure of history, some few facts about whom are nearly certain, while, at the same time, steadfastly maintaining that any historical curiosity about that figure springs from, or at least is threatened by, a "faithless objectifying." The presence of this antinomy does not, however, justify the claim, made by Ogden and Harvey, that the New Quest, in relation to Bultmann, is not new. See Van A. Harvey and Schubert M. Ogden, "How New is the 'New Quest of the Historical Jesus?'" HJKC, pp. 200-213.

This rarefied atmosphere of *sola fide* proved ultimately too thin for Bultmann's pupils. They feared that such a steep divide between the historical Jesus and the exalted Lord threatened to submerge the kerygma into a docetic sea. The genuine continuity which existed between the historical life of the earthly Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ was in danger of becoming blurred.[16] The New Quest accordingly sought to connect the kerygma more securely to the concrete historical figure of the earthly Jesus. If the goal of the old Quest was to loose the actual Jesus from his creedal captivity, the New Quest attempts to show that there exists an inseparable bond of unity between them.

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[14] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Hans-Werner Bartsch, editor (revised for "Harper Torchbooks" by Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), pp. 34-44.

[15] John B. Cobb, Jr., "The Post-Bultmannian Trend," *JBR*, XXX (1962), 4.

[16] See, for example, Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Cf. Robinson, *NQHJ*, pp. 12f.

These attempts to elaborate the unity between Jesus and the kerygma are of two general types.[17] One seeks to establish continuity by arguing that the kerygma itself presupposes not only the "that" of the historical Jesus but also specific content concerning his career. The other tries to demonstrate that in Jesus' words and deeds may be found, in embryo, the equivalent message of the kerygma.

In the brief period since the New Quest was launched, a rift has appeared between those who seem to be moving toward a liberal-type Quest, and those who, fearing an eclipse of the kerygma's primacy, have become more reserved in their pursuit of the New Quest's aims.[18] The groups have been termed, respectively, the "new questers" and the "kerygmatists."[19] Fuchs, Ebeling, and Robinson are numbered among the "new questers," while Käsemann and Conzelmann are "kerygmatists." The presence of this inner cleavage in the New Quest indicates more the sensitivity of Bultmann's pupils to the theoretical lacunae of his position than a solidly unified solution to the troubled question of the relationship between faith and historical study. Thus, it appears that Robinson's efforts to spark a major movement have eventuated in something less than the spectacular break-through which his essay proclaimed.[20]

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[17] Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," HJKC, pp. 20ff.

[18] James M. Robinson, "Basic Shifts in German Theology," Interp, XVI (1962), 96f. Cf. Brown, op. cit., pp. 11f.

[19] The terms were coined by Fuller, op. cit., p. 53.

## II. JAMES M. ROBINSON: AMERICAN ADVOCATE OF THE NEW QUEST

Rarely has any American New Testament scholar shared in so intimate a dialogue with an indigenous German movement as has James M. Robinson in connection with the New Quest.[21] His programmatic essay of 1959[22] served both to introduce English readers to the New Quest and to define the issues and program of the movement. What is more extraordinary is that this essay, slightly expanded and issued in German the following year,[23] served the same function in Germany.

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[20] Robinson contends that the new historiography provides a second avenue--parallel to the kerygma--to the person of Jesus: NQHJ, p. 85.

[21] A notable exception comes to mind regarding the participation of Shirley J. Case in the Christ-myth debate before World War I. Cf. *ante*, pp. 70f.

[22] James M. Robinson, NQHJ.

The aim of this section will be to indicate the thrust of Robinson's historiographical views and to relate them to the American ethos which figures both as an inescapable part of his heritage and as part of the cultural "fate" whose spell he is determined to break.[24] It will be argued here that Robinson's proposal can be understood best by viewing it as an attempt to negotiate a _via media_ between the conflicting claims of a kerygmatic theology and a continuing concern for the historical Jesus.

## _The New Historiography_

The dramatic quality of Robinson's essay is due precisely to his skill in portraying the impasse posed by the collision of the old Quest with the forces rendering it both impossible historically and illegitimate theologically. Robinson makes it quite plain that the historiography of the old Quest was totally inadequate. It was posited on a view that the Gospel sources intended to convey the objective, positivistic sort of information with which nineteenth century historians were concerned.[25] It thus attempted to reconstruct such external matters as names, dates, occurrences, and causes.[26] It failed, in short, to grapple with what Robinson considers the crucial aspect of history, namely, the human intentions and commitments which alone render external history meaningful.[27]

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[23] James M. Robinson, _Kerygma und historischer Jesus_ (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960). This work continues to be of great importance in Germany, as evidenced by a thoroughly revised second edition which appeared in 1967.

[24] Robinson is acutely sensitive to the controlling power of inherited categories and scholarly traditions, a fact which helps to explain both his ability as an analyst of scholarship and his interest in mediating critical cross-fertilization. Cf. Robinson, "Kerygma and History in the New Testament," _The Bible in Modern Scholarship_, J. Philip Hyatt, editor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965) [hereafter cited as "Kerygma and History"], p. 117.

Robinson's strictures against the historiography of the old Quest plainly dissociate his program from a mere renewal of the older kind of research. Indeed, Robinson is explicit in his criticism of Americans who remain in the old Quest tradition.[28] He thereby maintains a complete rejection of the "old" historiography. Yet Robinson, like the other New Questers, feels a basic dissatisfaction with the shift away from the historical Jesus which has been a hallmark of the Bultmannian epoch.[29] In the face of such a dilemma, Robinson discovers the solution in a radically new concept of history and the self.[30] The new, twentieth century historiography, as distinguished from that of the classical Quest, is equipped to use the Gospels as valid sources since it employs a historical method appropriate to the nature of history. So fruitful is this new historiography that it provides nothing less than a second avenue of approach--independent of the kerygma--to the historical Jesus.[31]

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[25] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 35-38.

[26] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 66f.

[27] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 67.

[28] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 9. Robinson's review of Morton Enslin's The Prophet from Nazareth (1961) is wholly unsympathetic, ending with this sobering sentence: "The critical reader of this book is compelled to become a Bultmannian." See James M. Robinson, "The Prophet from Nazareth," JBR, XXX (1962), 48.

The boldness of this affirmation demands a closer scrutiny of the foundations of Robinson's new historiography. He frequently speaks of it simply as "scientific historiography"[32] or "modern historiography."[33] What he means by these terms becomes clear in the stance of those men to whom he is indebted. The influence of Bultmann is everywhere apparent and, indeed, Robinson credits Bultmann with having prefaced Jesus and the Word (1926) with a classic statement of the modern view of history.[34] This view of history stems, according to Robinson, from such thinkers as Dilthey,[35] Croce,[36] Collingwood,[37] and Powicke.[38] Each of these men reflects the recent disposition to view history as "the act of intention, the commitment, the meaning for the participants, behind the external occurrence."[39] Instead of seeking a neutral standpoint, the new historian is willing to allow historical encounter to modify or even radically alter his own existence.[40] In this sense the new historiography is concerned with "the combination and interaction of objective analysis and existential openness."[41]

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[29] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 66ff.

[30] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 87ff.

[31] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 85.

[32] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 85.

[33] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 68.

Robinson relates these existentialist themes which permeate the new historiography to the theological considerations which led to the abandonment of the old Quest, affirming that a formal correspondence existed between them.[42] That is to say, both viewpoints saw authentic existence as constituted by commitment and constant engagement. This meant for the theologian that both the yearning for objective investigation and the postponement of the ultimate question of Jesus' significance for faith constituted an inauthentic flight to earthly securities.[43] It is precisely this existentialist orientation which identifies Robinson's proposal most intimately with the whole Bultmannian tradition and guarantees a point of contact with it. In affirming an existentialist starting point, however, the new historiography does not appear to have freed itself from all of the interests inherent in the old. This is particularly apparent in the object of Robinson's New Quest: the recovery of Jesus' understanding of existence. Whereas Robinson stringently criticizes the psychologism of the old Quest, with its interest in Jesus' personality and self-consciousness,[44] he is quite insistent that the historian now has access to Jesus' own understanding of his existence.[45] Thus the historian can discover whether or not Jesus understood himself to be "living out of transcendence."[46] It is a fair question to ask whether or not there is a real distinction, apart from the rhetoric of existentialism, between a search for Jesus' self-consciousness and for his selfhood, since both have as their object the inner life of Jesus. It is significant that Bultmann has no interest in Jesus as the exemplar of a decision of faith but only as the bearer of a message which calls for decision.[47]

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[34] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 70.

[35] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 67.

[36] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 31.

[37] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 67.

[38] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 30.

[39] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 67.

[40] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 77.

[41] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 96.

[42] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 46f.

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[43] Robinson repeatedly affirms that no historical study, including the historiography of the New Quest, can eliminate the radical demand for faith which confronts the potential believer: Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 47, 76, 94. Cf. Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" JBR, XXX (1962), 200.

[44] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 44. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," HJKC, pp. 18ff.

[45] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 69. [46] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 72.

So while it can be validly argued that the enabling factor for a New Quest is an existential understanding of history, Robinson's concern for the selfhood of Jesus appears to overlap with interests prominent in the old Quest. But beyond the question of whether or not Robinson seeks an object radically different from the older Quest, is the larger question of why Robinson advocates following a "second avenue," distinct from the kerygma, to the historical Jesus. It will be argued that Robinson's basic concern is to effect a *rapprochement* between the historical critic and the kerygmatic theologian; a *rapprochement*, furthermore, which is so insistently pursued as to force Robinson into a position which poses a threat to the logic of his position.

## Motives for a "Second Avenue"

Robinson's arguments in favor of opening the New Quest are predicated upon the insistence that even the kerygma points to the crucial significance of a historical person.[48] It is not concerned to proclaim mythological ideas, but rather the existential meaningfulness of Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, the existence of the Synoptic Gospels affirms that the Jesus proclaimed in the kerygma is rooted to a "pastness" which prevents the ultimate dissolution of his particular history into a series of present situations.[49] Thus, within the New Testament may be found the precedent which legitimates a return to the historical Jesus.

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[47] On this point see Harvey and Ogden, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-22.

So since the rise of modern historiography has made a New Quest possible, and the existence of the Synoptic Gospels grants it canonical legitimacy, the final factor which necessitates a New Quest may be examined. The present situation, comprised of a threatened kerygmatic docetism issuing from the debate on demythologizing, and, at the same time, a historical methodology able to recover the historical life of Jesus, Robinson believes to compel a New Quest. Thus, the demand for a New Quest is at bottom a pragmatic demand urged on by the actualities of the present time:

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[48] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 87.

[49] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 79. In Robinson's doctoral dissertation at Princeton he was already exploring the significance of the gospel as a kerygmatic Gattung. This study was published as The Problem of History in Mark (Studies in Biblical Theology No. 21. London: S C M Press, 1957), esp. pp. 12-15. For an autobiographical statement about how this work came to be written, as well as other important autobiographical information, see James M. Robinson, "The Problem of History in Mark, Reconsidered," USQR, XX (1965), 131-47.

> Given our existential situation as scholars in a world where a historical encounter with Jesus is possible, to neglect such an encounter would be a tacit admission either that Jesus is not the Lord, or that God cannot be encountered in history.[50]

For Robinson, one crucial aspect of "our existential situation" is the threat posed by critics of Bultmann such as Buri and Ogden who, by interpreting the kerygma as the mythical symbol of a religious truth, eliminate the historical reference inherent in the kerygma and thereby introduce a modern Gnosticism.[51] This allows Robinson to justify his renewal of interest in the historical Jesus as a necessary corrective:

> But the greater danger just now seems rather to reside in the possibility that our renunciation of this task of working out an understanding with the world could be confused with the Gnostic repudiation of the world.[52]

This concern for countering Bultmann's left-wing critics is one which Robinson shares with the New Questers in general.[53] Within his own American situation however, are special factors which Robinson believes require a New Quest. Before pointing these out, however, it is important to note a central clue to Robinson's outlook. He is deeply absorbed by the problems of hermeneutical translation.[54] The problem of "scoring the same point" in varying contexts has sharpened his interest in Traditionsgeschichte. Just as various traditions within the New Testament shift their hermeneutical ground in new situations in order to get across an equivalent point,[55] so Robinson is prepared to allow emergent contexts to dictate his "translation" of the kerygma. It is from this standpoint, for example, that he insists upon securing the historical touchstone of the kerygma by a New Quest when the message of the kerygma--transcendence within history--is endangered.[56]

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[50] James M. Robinson, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus Today," TTod, XV (1958-59), 197.

[51] Robinson, NQHJ, pp. 80-85.

[52] James M. Robinson, "The Formal Structure of Jesus' Message," The New Testament in Current Study: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper, William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, editors (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962) [hereafter cited as "Formal Structure"], p. 95.

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[53] Van A. Harvey, "The Historical Jesus, the Kerygma, and Christian Faith," RL, XXXIII (1963-64), 434f.

[54] Note, in particular, James M. Robinson, "Theology as Translation," TTod, XX (1963-64), 518-27. Robinson has been especially zealous to introduce the New Hermeneutic into the American scene. Cf. Robinson, "Hermeneutic since Barth," New H, pp. 1-77.

[55] Robinson has shown that the study of Traditionsgeschichte reveals the hermeneutical fluidity of the New Testament period. Thus (following Conzelmann's thesis), Mark introduced into an already kerygmatized tradition about Jesus his own paradoxical understanding of the kerygma, focusing upon the humiliation involved in Jesus' history. This introduction of a special Jesus-tradition in order to correct a Jesus-tradition which distorted the kerygmatic significance of Jesus suggests to Robinson the crucial role of the historical Jesus for maintaining a valid interpretation of the kerygma. See Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" JBR, XXX (1962), 202ff. for a concise statement. A fruitful expansion of this line of research may be found in Robinson, "Kerygma and History," pp. 131-46.

In the American milieu, then, the concrete situation calls for a New Quest:

> And the truth is that our situation is one where hero worship is much more widespread than the acceptance of the kerygma as a norm of existence, where endless spawning of lives of Jesus is one of the facts of life, and where a church that cannot claim the historical Jesus for its message is in a very awkward position.[57]

Robinson seems to be particularly sensitive to a hermeneutical analogy between Mark's situation and the American milieu. Just as Mark could no longer employ, in Pauline fashion, a pure kerygma-tradition, but was forced to meet a distortion of the Jesus-tradition on its own ground, i.e., by recourse to a corrective Jesus-tradition, so the American context, with its "endless spawning of lives," requires us to "implement the kerygma's claim to be proclaiming a Lord who is one with Jesus, and we must do this by critical participation in the discussion of the Jesus-tradition of our day."[58] Robinson explicitly remarks that Jesus' heroic courage and impressive personality, as depicted in the current lives of Jesus, resembles the divine-man Christology of the first century oral tradition.[59]

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[56] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 84.

[57] James M. Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" JBR, XXX (1962), 204.

[58] Ibid., p. 205.

At this point, the synthesizing motive in Robinson becomes visible. One can scarcely avoid the feeling that Robinson is attempting to fuse the kerygmatic-existentialist insights of the post-Bultmannians with the American interest in the historical Jesus. This feeling is substantially reinforced by the programmatic quality which permeates much of Robinson's writing. He in fact terms his survey of the New Quest "a programmatic essay."[60] The role of the New Quest as a major alternative is further enhanced by its alliance with what Robinson calls the New Hermeneutic. The description of both movements as "new" strengthens the impression that here a program is being proposed.[61] Robinson explicitly conceives of his essay examining the structure of Jesus' message as an illustration of the New Quest's procedural task ". . . at the beginning of a new period of research."[62]

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[59] Ibid., p. 208, footnote 31.

[60] Robinson, NQHJ, p. 9.

[61] The most vigorous criticisms of Robinson have probed at precisely the question of the alleged newness of these movements. Cf. Harvey and Ogden, op. cit., and Carl E. Braaten, "How New is the New Hermeneutic?" TTod, XXII (1965-66), 218-35.

In an address to the Society of Biblical Literature at its hundredth meeting in 1964,[63] Robinson expressed his hope for a renewed period of vigor in American biblical studies. Essential to this vigor was a recovery of theological relevance for biblical studies, a relevance which he believed to have existed in the early liberal period of the Society when historical criticism had been employed to dismantle the older orthodoxy.[64] In order to achieve a fruitful symbiosis between historical study and theology, he proposed, significantly for a New Quest, the transposing of the categories of history and kerygma--terms which have been rendered antithetical by scholarship of the last century--[65] into the more productive categories of Traditionsgeschichte and hermeneutic.[66] By this means, historical study of the most exacting rigor could work to uncover the context of a given tradition so as to allow the translation of its equivalent message into the modern context. This _rapprochement_ of theological and historical disciplines, involving as it does for Robinson a New Quest for the historical Jesus, reveals the two fronts on which he must fight. Against Bultmann and the "kerygmatists,"[67] Robinson contends that a refusal to engage in historical-critical study of Jesus spells the doom of historical criticism within the church.[68] Against the theological aloofness characteristic of American biblical scholarship, he argues that vigorous and creative research is contingent upon its relevance to the broad theological enterprise.[69] This synthesis of historical and theological concerns is rendered possible by a more careful hearing of the New Testament, a hearing that enables the scholar to break out of the deep ruts formed by a century of scholarship:

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[62] Robinson, "Formal Structure," pp. 95f.

[63] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," pp. 114-50.

[64] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," p. 120.

[65] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," p. 148.

[66] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," pp. 114-21. The influence of Gerhard Ebeling upon Robinson's hermeneutical stance is quite apparent. Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation, trans. Grover Foley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 25f.

> Thus the clear distinction, not to say antithetical relationship, characteristic of the terms kerygma and history, can be recognized as derived from the pendulum swings in the last century of scholarship, as the historical Jesus replaced dogmatic christology and then the kerygma replaced the historical Jesus, rather than being derived from the situation in the sources themselves, where a much more nuanced and complicated series of relationships calls for recognition.[70]

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[67] Cf. _ante_, p. 210.

[68] Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" _JBR_, XXX (1962), 207.

[69] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," p. 120.

[70] Robinson, "Kerygma and History," p. 148.

From this analysis it seems fair to conclude that Robinson's motives for advocating the "second avenue" involve an attempt to provide a middle ground between kerygmatic theology and historical criticism. The "new historiography" which provides the second path of access to Jesus combines the critical historical research so highly valued by American critics with an existentialist concern--analogous to the kerygma--for the understanding of existence revealed in historical events. In the American response to Robinson's proposal lie the clues of how well it has succeeded in enlisting American support. It is to this response that we now turn.

## III. AMERICAN RESPONSE TO THE NEW QUEST

The historiography of the New Quest as proposed by Robinson involves an existentialist understanding of history combined with a rigorously form-critical methodology, and is permeated by an acknowledgment of the centrality of the kerygma. Since these emphases are much more characteristic of the post-Bultmannian atmosphere in Germany than of the American context, the American response is quite eclectic in nature, often singling out only particular aspects of the New Quest to praise or blame. Rarely has the New Quest proposal, with its special cargo of concerns, been assimilated in its entirety by an American critic.[71] It has nevertheless been particularly instructive by serving to call forth American reaction to a specifically historiographical program.

The American response has been, outside of Robinson's own Gospel research, primarily limited to discussion and debate.[72] From a temporal standpoint that is admittedly too close for adequate perspective, yet being convinced of the pivotal nature of the issues raised to the American Quest by Robinson's proposal, an attempt will be made to identify the configuration of the response.

## Criticism of the New Quest

Perhaps the least surprising criticism directed against the New Quest by American critics is its avowed theological concern. Scholars who reflect an older liberal animus against theological "intrusion" into historical-critical study have rejected the attempt of the New Quest to establish continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Thus Henry J. Cadbury, who maintains that the biblical theologian's search for theological meaning in the Gospels exerts a bias upon historical study,[73] writes of the New Quest:

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[71] William E. Hull, e.g., raises the apposite question of whether the entire syndrome of concerns which characterize the New Quest must be embraced by those attracted to the New Quest, or whether, conversely, individual emphases may be appropriated without pledging allegiance to the entire platform of the movement. Cf. William E. Hull, "The New Quest of the Historical Jesus," RE, LXIV (1967), esp. 336-39.

[72] However, a very recent American study of Jesus, written later than the period which this dissertation treats, consciously adopts the New Quest position: Ernest W. Saunders, Jesus in the Gospels (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. iii.

> Any connections that are found between kerygma and Jesus of Nazareth seem to me more motivated by theological than by historical requirements--wishful thinking again. That is a dangerous criterion to rely on. The historians should strive to be more objective in spite of the difficulty of being so. Perhaps for a time the historian and the theologian should each plan to stay in his own field--to "stick to his last."[74]

Another stalwart of the historico-critical American school, Morton Enslin, likewise remains a determined foe of the synthesis of historical and theological study which the New Quest desiderates. In a symposium on the New Quest held in 1961, Enslin challenged the movement at the point of its attempt to establish continuity between Jesus and Christ:

> The real Jesus, that is, what is so commonly styled "the historical Jesus," is not the same as the Christ of faith, and, it appears to me, all attempts to make or continue that identification are unwise, if not actually perverse.[75]

In view of Enslin's caricature of Continental theology, which betrays his misunderstanding of the character of the New Quest,[76] his criticisms may best be seen as symptomatic of an arrested liberalism.

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[73] Cf. Henry J. Cadbury, "Gospel Study and Our Image of Early Christianity," JBL, LXXXIII (1964), 145.

[74] Cadbury, Eclipse, p. 32.

[75] Morton Enslin, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," JBL, XXX (1962), 219.

A more surprising kind of criticism is that which argues that the New Quest threatens to devalue the kerygma. The vigor with which this criticism is variously lodged offers evidence of a growing American concern for historical study which is open to theological questions.

Nowhere is this theological concern more apparent than in the criticisms offered the New Quest by James Smart. Smart terms the New Quest a "reversion" because, by its claim of a second avenue to Jesus, it jeopardizes the primacy of the kerygma.[77] Thus, the insights achieved when biblical theology exposed the theological inadequacy of historicism are now in danger of being lost in the revival of a new historical interest.

Carl Braaten also is strongly opposed to "the monstrous claim"[78] that the new historiography provides a second route to the person of Jesus. From a confessional viewpoint, deeply influenced by Martin Kähler,[79] he emphatically rejects the possibility that any historiography can establish the continuity existing between Jesus and the kerygma. Only in the commitment of faith, in confessing Jesus as Lord, does one discover that continuity.[80] Thus, without questioning the method or results of the New Quest, Braaten rejects the possibility of access to Jesus independent of the kerygma.

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[76] Ibid., pp. 219-21. Cf. James M. Robinson, "The Prophet from Nazareth," JBL, XXX (1962), 46f.

[77] James D. Smart, The Interpretation of Scripture (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 299-304.

[78] Carl E. Braaten, "Martin Kähler on the Historic Biblical Christ," HJKC, p. 105.

R. H. Fuller shares the same misgiving. In a review of Robinson's essay he cautioned:

> The effort to demonstrate the continuity between Jesus and the kerygma may so blur the difference between them that it will make the kerygma unnecessary. The result will be a neo-liberalism, a back-to-the-historical-Jesus; no longer of course an idealist, but an existential Jesus; no longer a nineteenth-century, but a twentieth-century figure.[81]

Fuller insisted that there was an important difference between Jesus and the kerygma: Jesus pointed to the beginning of God's decisive action, whereas the kerygma affirms that God has decisively acted.[82] The New Quest, in its zeal to demonstrate historical continuity, overlooks this important difference and runs the risk of rendering the kerygma obsolescent.

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[79] See his Introduction to Märtin Kähler, The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ, trans. and ed. Carl E. Braaten (Seminar Editions, ed. Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 1-38. Note also his criticism of Robinson's existentialist hermeneutic in his article, "How New is the New Hermeneutic?" TTod, XXII (1965), 277-82. Cf. Robinson's reply: "Braaten's Polemic: A Reply," TTod, XXII (1965), 218-35.

[80] Braaten, op. cit., p. 103.

[81] Reginald H. Fuller, a critical review, ATR, XLI (1959), 234.

Schubert Ogden and Van Harvey have subjected Robinson's thesis to a detailed analysis,[83] calling into question the alleged newness of the New Quest. In relation to Bultmann, they argue, it is not new, except in the very interest which Robinson mistakenly credited to Bultmann: a concern for the recovery of Jesus' selfhood.[84] This interest, they further insist, raises the question of how new the New Quest is in relation to the old. Harvey and Ogden fear that Robinson's claim that the new historiography provides an independent avenue to Jesus' selfhood revives anew the danger of attempting to confirm faith by historical study. If the old Quest was illegitimate because it was impelled by a faithless search for security, how new is the New Quest?[85]

The significance of this line of criticism must be underscored. In its concern for the centrality of the kerygma and the personal commitment of the historian, it constitutes a historiographical viewpoint which has only recently come into prominence in the American Quest. Although it is not by any means the dominant American response to the New Quest, it is a significant evidence that American biblical study can no longer be described as positivistic without ignoring the presence of other component factors.

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ogden and Harvey, op. cit.

[84] Ibid., pp. 218ff.

[85] Ibid., pp. 228ff.

## Support for the New Quest

One of Robinson's chief fears in proposing a New Quest was that in America it would be construed as a mere resumption of the older Quest.[86] He admits that despite his lengthy discussion of the valid arguments which render the old Quest illegitimate and impossible, there may be expected a blurring of the distinctions between the old Quest and the newer one.[87] And indeed one can point to a widespread acceptance of the proposal in America by individuals who share only partially the position expounded in Robinson's essay. Typical of those scholars who hail the New Quest but appear to value most its concern for the Jesus of history is

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[86] James M. Robinson, "The Recent Debate on the 'New Quest,'" JBR, XXX (1962), 199.

[87] *Ibid.*

Dwight M. Beck. Beck, in reviewing Bornkamm's Jesus of Nazareth, predicted that its influence would be greater than Bultmann's Jesus and the Word or Dibelius' Jesus because it "represents a more receptive attitude to the never-ending quest for the historical Jesus."[88] Beck seems to be somewhat oblivious to the crucial question of continuity which absorbs the New Quest. Revealingly, he concludes his review with praise for its treatment of "the most important issue in New Testament studies: the reliability of the Gospel accounts of Jesus."[89]

Donald T. Rowlingson welcomes the New Quest as a current manifestation of a search that is perennial and the object of which is constant:

> Whether the form be new or old, it is unavoidable, and the basic issue remains constant: Is reliable information about the pre-resurrection Jesus obtainable and, if so, does it serve any useful purpose for Christian faith and theology today?[90]

Clearly the New Quest, as it has been assimilated into the American context, has been modified. Apparently, one of the least appealing features of the New Quest as proposed by Robinson is its special existentialist coloring.[91] Existentialism has never gained a large following in America.[92] Although Tillich, who has taught in America since 1933, may be described as an existentialist thinker, and although Reinhold Niebuhr absorbed a large measure of existentialist thought, neither of these influential American figures is dominated by existentialist categories to the degree that the post-Bultmannians have been.[93]

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[88] Dwight M. Beck, "The Never-Ending Quest for the Historical Jesus," JBR, XXIX (1961), 227.

[89] Ibid., p. 231.

[90] Donald T. Rowlingson, "The Gospel-Perspective and the Quest of the Historical Jesus," JBR, XXXIII (1965), 329.

Hence, it is understandable that Amos Wilder, while supporting the new historical concern of the New Quest, prefers to frame his endorsement without "the technical language of existentialism."[94] Appealing to the "deepened" view of reality which generally pervades the modern arts in such modes as surrealism, non-representationalism and dynamism,[95] Wilder suggests that the existentialist viewpoint of the New Quest is only one expression of this modern mindset. One can sense that here Wilder is seeking to establish for the New Quest a point of contact with American culture. He is attracted to the New Quest because it focuses attention upon the concrete historical life of Jesus. Wilder, from his background of liberal-historical training, is convinced that the New Quest will serve to correct the danger inherent in existentialist hermeneutics--that of sealing off the kerygma from the kind of historical study which stresses the socio-historical setting of the revelation.[96]

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[91] Cf. Raymond E. Brown, "After Bultmann, What? - An Introduction to the Post Bultmannians," CBQ, XXVI (1964), 25f.

[92] On this point see James Collins, The Existentialists: A Critical Study (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. vii.

[93] Much of the American criticism directed against Bultmann's demythologizing proposal has focused on what is termed an excessively narrow existentialism. Cf. Amos Wilder, "Mythology and the New Testament," JBL, LXIX (1950), 113-27; Sherman E. Johnson, "Bultmann and the Mythology of the New Testament," ATR, XXXVI (1954), 29-47; Burton H. Throckmorton, The New Testament and Mythology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), pp. 110ff. More sympathetic to existentialist hermeneutics were Kendrick Grobel, "Bultmann's Problem of NT 'Mythology,'" JBL, LXX (1951), 99-103, and Erich Dinkler, "Existentialist Interpretation of the New Testament," JR, XXXII (1952), 87-96.

[94] Amos Wilder, "The New Quest for the Historical Jesus," CCr, XXII (1962-63), 245.

The support given to the New Quest by Ernest C. Colwell, Robinson's colleague and President of The School of Theology at Claremont, must appear peculiarly gratifying. Colwell, who was trained under Case at Chicago, became a productive member of the "Chicago School." His rejection of "Systematic-Biblical Theology," which he believed to be a Procrustean bed for biblical studies, was quite apparent in an article of 1960.[97] Yet Colwell predicted that a new period of study was emerging which could be termed "Historical-Biblical Theology."[98] He viewed the New Quest as a significant movement which, while theologically oriented, offset the disregard for history which the earlier period of biblical theology had fostered. Colwell's Jesus and the Gospel (1963) was intended to bring the historian and the theologian close to mutual understanding and effective cooperation.[99] He believed that a historian's exposition of modern historiography in its relation to the historical Jesus was needed ". . . when the comments of many theologians on historiography have for the historian the strangeness of messages from outer space."[100] Colwell's exposition of modern historiography is quite similar to Robinson's, though with differences in emphasis.[101] From this exposition of modern historiography, Colwell argues that the position of the New Quest is essentially sound. The acceptance of an unbroken continuity between Jesus and the exalted Christ, the attempt to recover Jesus' self-understanding, and the revival of interest in the Synoptics are cited as tendencies consonant with the modern view of history.[102] Quite significantly, Colwell hopes that the New Quest will not be limited to the existentialist critic, but will be pursued from other viewpoints as well.[103]

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[95] _Ibid_., pp. 245f.

[96] Amos Wilder, "New Testament Hermeneutics Today," _Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper_, William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 50f.

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[97] Ernest C. Colwell, "New Testament Scholarship in Prospect," JBR, XXVIII (1960), 202f.

[98] Ibid., p. 203.

[99] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel, p. ix.

[100] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel, p. ix.

[101] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel. Cf. pp. 3-20.

## V. CONCLUSION

The fortunes of the New Quest in America indicate that it is now possible, in the increasingly international context of theological studies, for American biblical scholarship to engage in fruitful interaction with a Continental trend. This fact suggests that a period of over-isolation in American scholarship may be at an end and that the special vigor of German theology may expect to receive a more careful hearing than it has received heretofore.

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[102] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel, pp. 39-41.

[103] Colwell, Jesus and the Gospel, p. 40. There is evidence that this hope is already in process of realization. The aims of the New Quest are being welcomed from many confessional quarters. Raymond Brown, a Catholic scholar, while lamenting the meager results of the New Quest, as well as its identification with existentialist philosophy, encourages Roman Catholic scholars to widen the areas of continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith from their own methodological viewpoint (Brown, op. cit., p. 29). Lutherans such as J. B. Bedenbaugh can hail the aim of the New Quest to create a rapprochement between faith and historical study (Bedenbaugh, "The First Decade of the New Quest of the Historical Jesus," LQ, XVI [1964], 266f.). And William E. Hull, a Southern Baptist scholar, can advocate the central concern of the New Quest as corresponding to a position which he had earlier taken on lines partly independent of the Bultmannian school (William E. Hull, "The New Quest of the Historical Jesus," RE, LXIV (1967), esp. 338f.

On the other hand, the American appropriation of the New Quest shows that the movement has been modified by traditional American tendencies such as an abiding interest in the ethical teaching of Jesus.[104] This is only to say that the New Quest has not immigrated intact to America. Its special connection with existentialism, for one example, seems likely to diminish in the American Quest. Hence, there has been a genuine cross-fertilization of theological heritages in the New Quest's encounter with American scholarship.

In historiography, the discussion sparked by the New Quest proposal shows a growing American awareness of the historical critic's inescapably theological role. The very presence of an American opposition to the New Quest on the grounds that it is an attempt to shore up faith by historical study is evidence that the older distrust of theological presuppositions has been modified. Yet at the same time, the American Quest remains strongly attached to a sort of "liberal" valuation of the historical career of Jesus. In

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[104] Cf. Colwell, _op_. _cit_., Chapter Three.

Colwell,[105] in Rowlingson,[106] and supremely in Enslin,[107] a premium is placed upon the exemplary character of Jesus' life as it is recovered by historical criticism. And it is not without significance that Robinson himself is more closely identified with the "new quester" wing of the New Quest than with the "kerygmatists.[108]

Finally, what shall be said of Robinson's attempt to fuse theological and historical research? In trying to establish the validity of both the kerygma's absoluteness and the value of the historian's understanding of the historical Jesus, Robinson has failed to escape a difficulty which haunts Christianity's claim that an absolute event took place in history. The difficulty with his proposed synthesis is that in giving the kerygma a controlling function, Robinson does not actually allow the historical critic complete autonomy. Robinson clearly affirms that the "kerygmatic avenue" is entirely sufficient to mediate a total encounter with the person of Jesus in which the self is put in radical decision.[109] If this renders the "historiographical avenue" superfluous, it does not, however, rule out its possibility. But when Robinson argues that if the historian should discover a basic discontinuity between Jesus' intention and the kerygma's witness to him then the paradox of faith would be overstretched,[110] he seems to circumscribe the results of criticism. This _a priori_ settlement of the question of continuity seems to relegate historical criticism to a confirmatory function. Thus, the success of Robinson's synthesis may be fairly called into question.

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[105] Ibid.

[106] Donald T. Rowlingson, Jesus the Religious Ultimate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 114-38.

[107] Morton Enslin, "The Meaning of the Historical Jesus for Faith," JBR, XXX (1962), 219-33.

[108] Cf. ante, pp. 210f.

But although there are apparently insoluble dilemmas which plague the theological interpretation of a historical personage, Robinson is on the right track. For while he grants the primacy of the apostolic kerygma, he has not jettisoned the claims which the believer in the twentieth century Western tradition knows to be ingredient of his historic situation: the claims of _fides quaerens intellectum_--faith in search of understanding.

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[109] Robinson, _NQHJ_, p. 85.

[110] Robinson, _NQHJ_, pp. 90f.

# CHAPTER VII

# CONCLUSION

Because all life-of-Jesus research entails a historical task it is incumbent upon the discerning critics to inspect the historiographical assumptions which have shaped the character and direction of that enterprise. This dissertation has not sought to trace the development of historical method, i.e., the evolution of methodological techniques; it has rather attempted to probe at a deeper and more amorphous level. It has been concerned to identify the historiographical mind-set which operates either as a conscious assumption or an elusive protophilosophy for the historian. And precisely because modern theologians are becoming increasingly sensitive to the full range of forces which comprise their own historicity, the critic cannot afford to leave his own tradition unexamined. The uncritical acceptance of one's tradition is a betrayal of the future; the uncritical by-passing of one's tradition is a betrayal of the past.[1] Hence, the need to unmask whatever historiographical assumptions have guided one's tradition in one segment of research--the life of Jesus--falls within this larger imperative.

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[1] Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. xi.

## I. DOMINANT HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN QUEST

Can it be said that there exists a peculiarly American historiographical outlook? Are there any readily identifiable presuppositions that are indigenous to America? These questions are bound up with the larger problematic of American intellectual history. It is quite impossible to speak of a native American tradition which was unaffected by waves of immigration and European cultural borrowing. The very newness of the American nation prevents its living out of an ancient ancestral soul. What Herbert W. Schneider said of American philosophy applies equally to our larger intellectual life: "We still live intellectually on the fringe of European culture."[2] But although American thought is profoundly derivative, it has given a special shape to borrowed ideas.[3]

The historiographical tendencies of American lives of

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[2] Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy (second edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. viii.

[3] The special American appropriation of Ranke's thought is a case in point. Cf. Georg Iggers, "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," HT, II (1962-63), 17-40.

Jesus participate in a similar dialectic. Sharing many assumptions of the larger European Quest, the American Quest produced, all the same, a distinctive bundle of historiographical assumptions. These identifying features include (1) a confidence in the historian's objectivity; (2) the ideal of theological detachment; (3) a strongly socio-environmental concern; and (4) a strongly empirical outlook. These will be examined briefly.

## Historical Objectivity

American critics have been little disposed to adopt a confessional approach to the life of Jesus. Both the conservative biographer of Jesus and his liberal counterpart were anxious to demonstrate an objectively proven figure.[4] The more critical lives were anxious to recover the outward nexus of events, the moral character of Jesus, his personal qualities, in short, the untheologized, "actual" Jesus.[5] This recovery was considered possible by applying the objective standards of historical criticism.

Broadly speaking, this confidence in the objective fact was a legacy of the Enlightenment's epistemological shift from revelation to reason. The more specifically

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[4] Cf. ante, pp. 73-76; 97f.; 109-17.

[5] Cf. ante, pp. 109-17; 162-76.

American context of objective confidence includes a philosophical and theological heritage which gave a large place to objective and empirical observation. In philosophy, the streams of British empiricism, Scottish common sense, and the radical empiricism associated with pragmatism[6] all gave to American thought a prominently objectivist outlook. In theology there was a strong reaction against the romantic subjectivism of early liberalism; this reaction was expressed in the "Realistic" theologies of D. C. Macintosh and Henry N. Wieman who campaigned for objectivity in religion.[7]

The American confidence in historical objectivity is intimately related to a pervasive historical optimism which has characterized American theology.[8] Such men as Mathews, Case, and McCown maintained a view of history which presupposed an evolutionary meliorism.[9] The entire reaction of early liberal thought to Calvinistic determinism was a move toward a happier estimate of man and history. It is Emerson, not Melville, who best captures the American mood of confidence. Only in the years since the collapse of liberalism has American theology become responsive to the possibility that historical events may bear significances which are not immediately knowable to the "objective" historian. And in the "uninterrupted Quest" of America may be seen evidence of the continuing vitality of historical optimism. This optimism has been reinforced by the second feature of American historiographical presuppositions: an empirical outlook.

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[6] Cf. Schneider, op. cit., pp. 216-20; 277-84; 321.

[7] Sidney Ahlstrom "Theology in America," The Shaping of American Religion, J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, editors (Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison. 4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 309.

[8] Cf. ante, pp. 117-24.

[9] Cf. ante, pp. 147; 163-67.

## An Empirical Stance

American historiography came of age in the period of the triumph of natural science.[10] To establish their own credentials as respectable disciplines, both historical study and philosophy sought to emulate the methods and outlook of natural science.[11] This pressure to vindicate the scientific integrity of one's academic field also affected theology,[12] and especially historical criticism of the

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[10] Cf. ante, pp. 101-9.

[11] The American pragmatists are an excellent example of radical philosophical empiricism. See Schneider, op. cit., pp. 476-91.

[12] No other nation produced a theological movement as scientifically oriented as the modernists of the twentieth century American liberalism. D. C. Macintosh and Henry N. Wieman, in particular, advocated an empirical theology. Cf. ante, pp. 104-9.

Bible. The critical historian of Jesus' life was able to use scientific historical methods as effective instruments for both polemics and apologetics.[13] Against traditional orthodoxy, historical criticism was deployed to challenge supernaturalism; against skepticism it was used to prove the historicity of Jesus. Both achievements enhanced the image of empirical history as a potent critical weapon.

The empirical approach to the life of Jesus, where scientific method was vested with final authority, reinforced the historian's certainty that his method provided him with a large measure of objectivity. Thus, the scientific historian achieved the status of ultimate arbiter of the significance of Jesus. The Christological certitude which was lost when biblical authority was relativized was compensated for by the empirical establishment of the historical certainties of Jesus' character, deeds, and teaching. One distinctive aspect of the scientific American criticism was a special interest in the socio-environmental setting of Jesus' life.

## Socio-Environmental Interest

A persistent feature of American study of Jesus is an interest in the social forces and environmental conditioning affecting Jesus.[14] Perhaps the very tangibility of these forces appealed to minds happily disposed to inductive investigation. They do not have the abstract, timeless quality of existentialist historiography, for instance. From the Chicago School to the most recent hermeneutical dialogues between American and Continental theologians, a jealousy for the concrete cultural conditioning of the revelation in Jesus Christ has characterized American critics.[15] Furthermore, their analysis of such relatively objective and measurable realities does not demand the risk of personal commitment which such a stance as existentialist historiography calls for. This, in turn, points to another broad feature of American historiography: theological detachment.

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[13] Cf. ante, pp. 67-71; 110-12; 119-24.

[14] Cf. ante, pp. 125-49.

## The Ideal of Theological Detachment[16]

Like the other historiographical tendencies ascribed here to American critics, theological detachment has neither been total nor uniformly operative throughout the century which has been surveyed. It is rather a stance which has been assumed so often and so pervasively as to represent a typical feature of the American lives.[17]

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[15] Cf. *ante*, pp. 125-49; 163; 234.

[16] Cf. *ante*, pp. 109-16; 143-46; 162-76.

[17] Roy A. Harrisville, "Representative American Lives of Jesus," *HJKC*, pp. 173-75. Cf. Hugh Anderson, *Jesus and Christian Origins: A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 67-76.

The relationship of theological neutrality to the ideals of objectivity and empiricism is plain. If the historian of Jesus were to uncover the actual, non-kerygmatic, historical figure of Jesus, he felt obliged to assume the disinterested stance of the laboratory technician. The value of permitting the autonomy of the historian had become obvious in the battle between the rights of the higher critics and the traditional biblicists. But whereas the ideological victory had been an easy one for the higher critics, the actual longevity of the conservatives has tended to perpetuate the ideal of detachment among many critical historians.[18] One feels in reading such men as Enslin, McCown, and F. C. Grant that they remain locked in mortal combat with the theological-critical aberrations of the Fundamentalists.[19] Apparently, the bitterness of the struggle for the rights of historical criticism and the later Fundamentalist controversy have engendered a lingering suspicion of any form of theological engagement.[20] The long-lived American rejection of the theological volte face which swept the Continent after World War I was partially prompted by this culturally conditioned animus against theology.[21] The American historians of Jesus have recently come under the influence of the theological critique of historicism.[22] At an accelerated pace, the ideal of theological detachment is being modified. Nevertheless, over the period surveyed, and at the zenith of the life-of-Jesus study, theological neutrality was a coveted historiographical ideal.

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[18] Cf. ante, pp. 162-76.

[19] E.g., Morton S. Enslin, "Biblical Criticism and Its Effect on Modern Civilization," Five Essays on the Bible (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1960), pp. 42-44.

[20] Cf. ante, pp. 60-67; 162-76; 226-28.

## II. CRITIQUE

On the basis of these historiographical assumptions operating within the American Quest, how shall the American tradition be assessed? Its weaknesses and strengths reside in a symbiotic relationship. Very close to its greatest assets lurk its most glaring liabilities.

A primary weakness of the American Quest's historiography is its intermittent isolation from the international context of biblical studies. The American Quest was a late phenomenon, comparatively speaking. Higher criticism did not establish itself as a potent force in America until the turn of the nineteenth century.[23] This insularity from the advanced critical achievements of the Continent, and even Great Britain to some extent, can be traced to several factors. The denominational support of the American seminaries naturally promoted a fidelity to orthodoxy;[24] the nineteenth century era of revivalism fostered an undercurrent of anti-intellectualism which helped to cut the nerve of critical research;[25] and American colleges did not break away from the dominance of classical education to a more scientifically oriented curriculum until after the Civil War.[26]

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[21] Cf. _ante_, pp. 60-76.

[22] Cf. _ante_, pp. 153-162.

[23] Cf. _ante_, pp. 60-67.

Then the cultural isolation which characterized the formative years of American biblical studies was dramatically broken in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Continental historical criticism was imported into the American milieu and became a powerful force in breaking the grip of orthodoxy. American biblical studies achieved a high degree of engagement with international biblical studies. The discipline of socio-environmental history flourished at the University of Chicago. An indigenous American school of historical criticism was formed; American critics actually pioneered in a sort of proto-form criticism.[27]

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[24] Cf. ante, pp. 23f.

[25] Cf. Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 81-116.

[26] Cf. ante, pp. 14f.

But unfortunately, a second period of isolation reappeared in the years between the World Wars. Perhaps the emergence of highly able American critics tended to relax the need for European training. Furthermore, the animosity against Germany after World War I was probably a factor in the cultural isolation of American New Testament study.[28] At any rate, it is extremely suggestive that few of the giants of New Testament study in America between the wars were trained in Germany. Whereas Bacon, Goodspeed and Case had studied in German universities before World War I, the later generation including Cadbury, F. C. Grant, Knox, and Colwell did not study in Germany. And since the erosion of historicism and the theological resurgence originated in Germany between the wars, American New Testament study, by virtue of its own brand of post-war isolationism, was able to perpetuate the older tradition despite the shifting emphasis in Europe. These spasmodic withdrawals from international trends has served to hamper American scrutiny of its historiographical assumptions. In short, there has existed an uncritical criticism.

The recent emergence, however, of a group of American scholars who are keenly aware of the full problematic of the historical Jesus--involving both historical and theological issues--is an encouraging sign. And because the newer critics bear the credentials of a thoroughly critical approach, there now exists the possibility of a more fruitful discussion of the divisive issues among American critics than was true in the past. For all too long the historicist tradition in America had no effective opposition. This led to a posing of options that were too crudely framed. The questions could be reduced to such roughhewn disjunctives as either Christ or criticism; either faith or historical reason; either high Christology or scientific historiography. And in the face of such extreme alternatives the critic's choice seemed to be reduced to either believing obscurantism or heretical allegiance to the truth. In the present situation, however, the thorny problems that plague the historical Jesus debate can be more judiciously nuanced. This will permit a sharpening of the issues at stake, and, in principle, prepare for a satisfying solution.

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[27] Cf. ante, pp. 132-36.

[28] Cf. ante, pp. 204f.

The American Questers' historiography can be best evaluated by viewing it within the larger context of the faith-history problem. The dilemma posed by the collision of the historico-critical method and the affirmations of Christian theology has charted the main directions of post-Enlightenment Protestant theology. Nowhere has the collision been more violent than in the study of Jesus. How can a historical event, with all of its particularity and critical elusiveness, safely remain the foundational affirmation of Christian faith? Can the believer's absolute commitment rest on the shifting sands of historical assertions? This dilemma has exercised the best abilities of a galaxy of theological luminaries: Lessing, Kierkegaard, Troeltsch, Barth and Bultmann.

Over the period surveyed, American historiography has shown a deep sensitivity to the claims of historical criticism. The dominant characteristics listed above--critical objectivity, empirical method, socio-environmental study, and theological detachment--were cultivated in order to facilitate a more exact historical criticism. But until quite recently, American historiography was able to ignore the theological dilemma which was created by the ultimate logic of the historical-critical method, based as it was upon a historicistic outlook. This blurring of the theological dimension of the life of Jesus has been the most serious weakness of the American Quest. It has nurtured a separation between the kerygmatic Christ and the historical Jesus, thereby endangering the centrality of the kerygma. In its general unwillingness to be guided by the Christology of the kerygma, American historiography has mistakenly intimated that the application of scientific historical methodology can lay bare the meaning of Jesus' life.

Again, the orthodox American historiography has, by its allegiance to an obsolete historicism, tended to "naturalize" history. Viewing all of history as a closed continuum of historical cause and effect, and disallowing for the historian qua historian categories of transcendence and uniqueness within history, it inevitably fostered a religious relativism which calls into question the biblical revelation.

In its recoil from every form of confessionalism as a sacrifice of the intellect, the American Quest has been rigorously devoted to higher criticism. It has been marked by a willingness to allow its object of faith to be recovered by historical criticism unfettered by dogma. The historical method was thereby elevated to the office of faith's arbitrator. Yet in the light of criticism's notorious impermanence--the shifting critical estimates of Jesus' message, for example--can faith so directly depend on historical science? The imprecision inherent in historical study demands a more adequate foundation for faith.

Although sweeping judgments are hazardous, it appears that the American Quest has been granted the luxury of relative exemption from the pangs of the faith-history dilemma by a largely melioristic history. Whereas Europe was pondering the ruins of a catastrophic history in the first half of the twentieth century, America was temporarily cushioned from a comparable sense of Angst. Limitless possibilities for the human spirit seemed to reside in her history. In such an atmosphere, short-lived though it has proved to be, there was little urgency to relate the noble but time-conditioned life of Jesus to the eternal revelatory event proclaimed in the kerygma.

But although they have failed to do justice to the theological side of the faith-history problem, the American critics have preserved an important insight by their emphasis upon the real historical Jesus. There has been no tendency toward a docetic removal of Jesus' life from empirical history. Here full allowance has been made for the earthly conditionedness of the Incarnation. The resilience of the British empirical tradition, assuming the form of pragmatism in America, has served as a sheet anchor against the currents of German idealism. There has been, therefore, little disposition on the part of American critics to see Christian faith as the expression of a timeless ideal or a possibility of self-understanding. Jesus' history has been taken with all seriousness, a fact which protects the valid function of historical criticism within the church. And while faith cannot be made contingent upon the absolute accuracy of a critical recovery of the historical Jesus, faith must be allowed the attempt to understand itself.

Although the American Quest's commitment to _fides quaerens intellectum_ has been far too one-sided, it has served to counterpoise _sola fide_ as an aspect of the believer's experience.

The most promising direction toward the solution of the faith-history dilemma lies in an attempt to do justice to both faith and history. The mainstream of the American Quest attempted to dismiss the theological question and has proved bankrupt. The dialectical theologians attempted to by-pass historical reason and their solution proved ultimately unsatisfactory. The attempt of the New Quest to unite theological and historical concerns, while it has not freed itself of all difficulties,[29] is a highly significant attempt to do justice to both claimants in the faith-history dispute. Still another promising solution may lie in the framing of a more adequate view of history--one commensurate with the biblical witness to historical events such as the Resurrection. Richard R. Niebuhr and Wolfhart Pannenberg have each in their distinctive ways pointed to such a possibility.[30]

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[29] Cf. _ante_, pp. 238f.

[30] Carl E. Braaten, _History and Hermeneutics_ (Vol. II of _New Directions in Theology Today_, ed. William Hordern. 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966-), pp. 47; 92-99.

This dissertation, however, was not launched to solve the dilemma of the faith-history problem. It aims at a more modest function. It is intended both to protect our past and to protect us from our past. By identifying the historiographical presuppositions which have guided the American Quest, it may safeguard that unrepeatable past from historical annihilation. By the same token, it may prevent an unexamined tradition from unduly constricting the present critical alternatives.

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# ABSTRACT

# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS IN AMERICAN STUDY OF JESUS, 1865-1965

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This dissertation is a critical examination of the historiographical presuppositions which have been operative in American study of Jesus' life from 1865 to 1965. A given critic's historiography reflects his philosophy of history, his view of the nature of history, and his method of investigating history. It involves, in short, the entire range of impelling presuppositions governing his understanding of the past.

The study of Jesus in America before 1865 is traced through three distinct approaches: orthodox supernaturalism; rationalism; and early liberalism. In all of these strands was found a general apathy toward historical study. Scholastic Calvinism and the static truths of reason retarded a historical consciousness. The Gospels were viewed as historical documents.

Between 1865 and 1900 a historical awakening occurred in American theology, effecting the rise of higher criticism. Although the historical critics agreed that the recovery of the life of Jesus was a historical task, there

was no universal agreement on the procedures of the task. Hence, such factors as the historian's theological predilections, his intuitive grasp of what comprised a "historical" source, and the positing of authentic historical sources within the Gospels guided the critical recovery of Jesus' life.

From 1900 to 1930 the American Quest was characterized by a search for scientific precision. Due to the prestige of the natural sciences, biblical critics were driven by the need for academic acceptance to embrace the ideal of a "scientific" historical criticism. To achieve this ideal, American critics attempted to suppress theological questions and insisted that their method become truly empirical. The Questers of the "Chicago School" represent the most thoroughgoing example of this approach.

Though these tendencies continued during the period 1930-1965, they were increasingly modified by a theological critique of objective history. By 1930 American theology was beginning to respond to the theological renaissance which had swept Europe. In the study of Jesus this meant a fundamental questioning of the adequacy of historicism to grasp the life of Jesus. Figures such as Enslin, McCown, and often F. C. Grant retain a basic continuity with older historicism. But a new willingness to see a theological aspect of the historian's task is clear in such critics as

Filson, Knox, Pittenger and Braaten. Between these two positions are critics such as Cadbury and Wilder.

A noteworthy attempt to overarch the tensions between historical and theological methodology can be seen in the New Quest, a movement spearheaded in America by James M. Robinson. The distinct historiography of the New Quest views human intentions and commitment, rather than matters of chronology and external events, as the significant keys to history.

Robinson's advocacy of the New Quest is viewed as motivated by a desire to establish a critical rapprochement between German and American scholarship. American response to the New Quest ranges from rejection by critics who fear its theological moorings, to warm approval. Even critics who are sympathetic to the aim of the New Quest seldom embrace all of the special concerns of the program.

The concluding chapter points out four dominant historiographical tendencies which have characterized the American Quest: (1) a confidence in historical objectivity, (2) the ideal of theological neutrality, (3) a strong socio-environmental concern, and (4) an empirical outlook.

Weaknesses of the American tradition include an insularity from international trends, an impoverished view of history, and, most serious of all, a blurring of the theological task of biblical criticism.

Strengths of the American Quest include an insistence upon the real historicness of the Incarnation, a preservation of the function of criticism for the church, and a frank engagement with the apologetic task of faith attempting to understand itself.

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